Mathiesens Are Different

Stories of a Very Odd Family

Robert Mathiesen

At the Sign of the

Dancing Skeletons

Providence, Rhode Island

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If you cannot get rid of the family skeleton, you may as well make it dance.

— George Bernard Shaw, *Immaturity* (1921), p. xxiv.

The woodcut on the title page comes from
Hartmann Schedel, *Liber chronicarum* (Nuermberg, 1493), fol. CCLXIIII.

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Acknowledgements

My brother, Thomas James Mathiesen, was there with me for all but the first five years of my life in our family. Naturally, he remembered some things that I had forgotten, and he saw other things in a different light than I did; this proved quite helpful as I sought to give the best account I could of our family's history as I have come to understand it. If he were writing our history, his version of at least some of it would be different from mine, and that's fine with me! These stories reflect only my perceptions of our history, and mine alone. He has generously read through my drafts of this book as I was writing it, and all of his comments have helped me make it a much better work. He also has had considerable experience as an editor, and was able to improve my writing in many places.

Thank you so much, Tom!

My wife, Theresa Elva Mathiesen, has heard me tell these stories all the years of our life together—53 years so far!—and has always encouraged me to preserve them for our posterity. As I was putting this book together, she often reminded me of stories that I had forgotten to include in earlier drafts. She is also an experienced editor and proofreader of scientific papers. She read through all my drafts more than once with her usual keenness of eye and ear, catching and fixing my slip-ups and blunders in so many places!

Thank you so much, Elva!

Telling Family Stories

The universe is made of stories, not of atoms.[1]

WE ARE ALL STORY-TELLING ANIMALS. Even the least skilled among us can tell a small story as needed. Have you ever done something that others didn't like? The words you utter as you try to excuse yourself make a small story, a story about yourself and why you had to do whatever it was that you did.

Stories are the high road to power, the road that everyone travels. As you frame your excuse, you hope it will have power enough to restore you to others' good graces.

And yet, stories have power over the people who tell them, too, not just over those to whom they are told. Every story you tell over the course of your life shapes the person you yourself are always becoming.

Herein lies the story-teller's paradox. We say that we tell our stories. Might it not be more true to say that our stories tell us? Which comes first, the story-teller or the story?

People do indeed shape the stories that they tell. Yet the more powerful a story is, the more it also shapes the person who tells it, as well as the people who hear it told. It is the stories I have to tell here about my ancestors, as much as anything else, that have shaped me into the man I am today.

The most powerful stories of all may come down through the ages. They will outlive every person who tells them. They constantly create and re-create a world in which generation after generation lives and moves and has its being. They are among the greatest treasures of humankind.

My stories are not as powerful as that. It is only myself and my own kinfolk who inhabit the world of my stories, and I do not suppose they might interest anyone else who does not already know some of us. Yet for us they may still have both use and value.

★ ★ ★

You may object—stories are merely words. Can mere words have such power? Can they have such value?

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[1] Muriel Rukeyser, "The Speed of Darkness," in her *The Speed of Darkness* (New York: Random House, 1968), part V.

Rudyard Kipling, himself a true master of storytelling, once addressed a gathering of surgeons and said,

> *I am, by calling, a dealer in words; and words are, of course, the most powerful drug used by mankind.*[2]

Words are the most powerful drug used by mankind! As the surgeons and physicians in his audience knew, in medicine any drug can be a blessing or a bane; it can be a remedy that cures or a poison that kills. The dose matters, and the patient's condition.

So it is with stories. Blessing or bane, it depends on the condition of each hearer, and also on the dose that the storyteller administers as he tells his stories. I want my stories to be blessings, not banes. Yet it is up to you, not to me, which they prove to be for you. This book is somewhat like a home medicine cabinet, where both the choice of medicine and the dose you take of it are yours to determine.

Yet there may be more than all this to the power that stories have over life. The late Sir Terry Pratchett, renowned author of fantasy novels, gave a remarkable lecture to the assembled Folklore Society at London in 1999. Its title was "Imaginary Worlds, Real Stories."[3] In it he proposed what he called the **Theory of Narrative Causality.**

Pratchett leads off by saying that he is not a folklorist himself, but he is a *"vast consumer of folklore,"* and that folklore has affected all his work as an author. He views his novels as collaborative with his readers: *"those sitting in the circle of firelight while the story is told are not passive listeners, but believe they have some rights in the story and that the story itself is a window into another world with a quasi-existence of its own."* He then continues his lecture with several examples from his own fantasy novels.

Finally he states again that he is merely a consumer of folklore, not a student of folklore: *"I did not study folklore any more than a butterfly studies flowers. I certainly wasn't in any sense scholarly. But as a young writer* [...] *I started noticing patterns."* And these patterns led him to the idea of *"narrative causality—the idea that there are 'story shapes' into which human history, both large scale and at the personal level, attempts to fit."* Or, he allows, *"it's probably more sensible to say that we ourselves for*

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[2] Rudyard Kipling, "Surgeons and the Soul" [1923], in his *A Book of Words* (London: Macmillan, 1928), ch. XXIII.

[3] Terry Pratchett, "Imaginary Worlds, Real Stories: The Eighteenth Katharine Briggs Memorial Lecture, November 1999," *Folklore,* vol. 111 (2000), pp. 159–168.

some reason have the story shapes in our mind, and attempt to fit the facts of history into them."

After that he quotes from his fantasy novel, *Witches Abroad* (published in 1991):[4]

> *Stories, great flapping ribbons of shaped space-time, have been blowing and uncoiling around the universe since the beginning of time. And they have evolved. The weakest have died and the strongest have survived, and they have grown fat on the retelling . . . stories, twisting and blowing through the darkness.*
>
> *And their very existence overlays a faint but insistent pattern on the chaos that is history. Stories etch grooves deep enough for people to follow in the same way that water follows certain paths down a mountainside. And every time fresh actors tread the path of the story, the groove runs deeper.*
>
> *This is called the theory of narrative causality and it means that a story, once started,* takes a shape. *It picks up all the vibrations of all the other workings of that story that have ever been.*
>
> *This is why history keeps repeating all the time.*
>
> *So a thousand heroes have stolen fire from the gods. A thousand wolves have eaten grandmother, a thousand princesses have been kissed. A million unknowing actors have moved, unknowing, through the pathways of story.*
>
> *It is now* impossible *for the third and youngest son of any king, if he should embark on a quest which has so far claimed his older brothers, not to succeed.*
>
> *Stories don't care who takes part in them. All that matters is that the story gets told, that the story repeats. Or, if you prefer to think of it like this: stories are a parasitical life form, warping lives in the service only of the story itself.*

Stories etch grooves deep enough for people to follow! As you read through my family stories here, you may notice narrative causality at work here and there. The most striking example is a pair of stories, one from my father's side of the family, the other from my mother's. Katrina Wormsløv was a servant girl when she met her future husband, Jens Holm Thrane, in Denmark. Mary Harvey was a servant girl when she met her future husband, Charles Cushman, in New England. Each woman married and had children and grandchildren. Each told her descendants a story of how she had been born to better things, to wealth and high position; but by an unjust fate she had been reduced to such poverty that she was compelled to do menial service in order to survive.

Each woman shaped her life after marriage to reflect her story, though each did it in her own way. Katrina (Wormsløv) Thrane made her household into an important

[4] Terry Pratchett, *Witches Abroad* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1991), pp. 2–3.

center of Danish-American high society in San Francisco. Mary (Harvey) Cushman inspired her husband, children and grandchildren to develop various schemes to recover at least the wealth, if not the social position, that she thought had been her due.

I am not able to say to what extent each woman's story holds a kernel of historical truth, but historical truth is quite beside the point I want to make here. My point is simply this: stories shape our lives, whether we like it or not. These stories shaped their lives.

Wise people know this and use stories to shape their own lives as they deem best. Ancestral stories seem to have more of this power to shape their descendants' lives than other kinds of stories do. We are the product of our ancestors not merely by virtue of the genetic material we have inherited from them, but also by virtue of the stories we have inherited from them.

★ ★ ★

My family's hometown was Berkeley, on the East shore of the San Francisco Bay, in Alameda County, California. To some extent the two other towns in Alameda county, Oakland and Alameda, were secondary hometowns, too, where some of our kin lived. Nor was San Francisco, shining across the Bay to our West, a place entirely apart from our hometowns. All our ancestral roads converged on the San Francisco Bay. More recently, they converged on Berkeley.

As the poet Lew Welch wrote of all the land around the San Francisco Bay,

> *This is the last place. There is nowhere else to go.*
>
> Human movements,
> but for a few,
> are Westerly.
> Man follows the Sun.
>
> *This is the last place. There is nowhere else to go.*
>
> . . . . .
>
> *This is the last place. There is nowhere else to go.*
>
> Centuries and hordes of us,
> from every quarter of the earth,
> now piling up,
> and each wave going back
> to get some more.
>
> *This is the last place. There is nowhere else to go.*
>
> . . . . .
>
> *This is the last place. There is nowhere else to go.*

For we have walked the jeweled beaches
at the feet of the final cliffs
of all Man's wanderings.

This is the last place.

There is nowhere else we need to go.[5]

There is nowhere else we need to go! So it seemed to all my ancestors, whether the earliest immigrants came from England, from the Netherlands, from France, from Germany, from Denmark, from Canada, or simply from the more easterly states of the nation. They all wandered westward, just as far as the land around San Francisco Bay, and there they ended all their wanderings.

It remained only for my brother and me, and for our cousin, the adopted daughter of our mother's sister, to leave California and move eastward, by different routes, back across the continent. In the generation after ours, some of us traveled even further eastward, back across the Atlantic to that Europe which our forebears were glad to flee so long ago. We have only one or two living relatives in California now, and none at all with whom we have kept in touch.

It was my child's imagination that caused me first to gather up and treasure these stories of my ancestors. They spoke to unfathomed depths in me then, and they did so in ways I was far too young to put into words. I can still say, as Maurice Sendak said in his old age,

> *In reality, childhood is deep and rich. It's vital, mysterious, and profound. I remember my own childhood vividly. I knew terrible things ... but I knew I mustn't let adults know I knew ... it would scare them.*[6]

My mother, in particular, prided herself on living for the present and the future, and she always said that she had trouble recalling the past. Yet there were times when I thought it wasn't so much that she *couldn't* recall the past, as that she *wouldn't* recall it. There were times when I wanted to talk about our family's past with her and she would flat-out refuse to tell me what I was most eager to know. Often I was able to fill in the gaps as an adult, working from written records. Sometimes not even that worked, and the blanks remain. You may notice a few of these gaps here and there as you read the stories.

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[5] Lew Welch, "The Song Mt. Tamalpais Sings," in his *The Song Mt. Tamalpais Sings,* Maya Quarto Five ([San Francisco:] Cranium Press, 1969), pp. [7]–[8].

[6] Art Spiegelman and Maurice Sendak, "In the Dumps," *The New Yorker,* vol. 69, no. 31 (September 17, 1993), pp. 80–81.

My father's mother (Nana) was far more forthcoming about her side of my family. Almost every story I have about my father's ancestors came to me from her.

So here are all my family stories. Part 1 offers the stories from my father's side of my family; Part 2, the stories from my mother's side.

May they prove as useful to you in your future as they have been to me in my past!

PART 1

STORIES FROM MY

FATHER'S SIDE

OF THE FAMILY

1
COMING TO THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY

ALL MY IMMIGRANT ANCESTORS ON MY FATHER'S SIDE left Denmark in the years 1868 and 1869, and all of them settled around the San Francisco Bay, in California, soon after they got to the United States.

In those days the Golden Gate was still unbridged. Most of the ships that passed through it into or out of the Bay rode the wind and the tides only, nothing more.

The Golden Gate Before It Was Bridged

The first of my ancestors to reach California came in through the Golden Gate on just such a sailing ship. It was a whaler out of Copenhagen, and he was a whaleman, come around Cape Horn and up the Pacific coast. In 1869, when he got to San Francisco, he jumped ship and became a landsman. He was in his late twenties at the time. His name was Martin William Mathiesen, and he was my father's grandfather.

My father's two grandmothers were sisters, Marie and Elise Thrane. They were born and raised in Frederikshavn, a town in the far north of Jutland. In 1868 their entire

family uprooted itself, crossed the Atlantic by steamship, spent a few years in Omaha, Nebraska, and ended up in San Francisco around 1876. Marie was 12 and Elise was 9 years old when they left Denmark.

My father's other grandfather was Frederick Christian Bender, and he came from Næstved, a city in the south of Zealand, the largest island in Denmark. His mother was Danish, but his father was a German from Hamburg. He emigrated in 1869, and he, too, was in his late twenties at the time.

What stories I have about their lives and their ancestry were told to me by my father's mother, Frances Eda (Bender) (Mathiesen) Petersen. I called her "Nana," which means "grandmother." Since she was born in 1887, she knew her immigrant ancestors well (except for her grandfather Thrane, who had died when she was not quite four years old). Precise dates and places have been taken, of course, from a wide range of official records, in English and in Danish.

Here are their stories. But first here is a little bit of Danish history, just enough to explain why they emigrated ...

It is no accident that all these ancestors of mine had left Denmark in 1868 and 1869. Those were years of severe national trauma for the whole nation.

The country's very popular liberal king, Frederik VII, died late in 1863, only days before he was to sign a new, yet more liberal constitution that had been drafted for the kingdom. He did not have any legitimate children, so it was unclear at first who might succeed to the throne. His eventual successor, King Christian IX, lacked the old king's popularity and was much less liberal in his political views.

Then in 1864 Prussia invaded Denmark—this was the Second Schleswig-Holstein War—and within six months Prussian troops had occupied all of Jutland up to its northmost point at the town of Skagen. Under the Treaty of Vienna, which ended that war in the fall of 1864, Denmark was compelled to cede about 40% of its territory to the victors, mostly to Prussia. It was quite an ignominious military and political defeat, and it contributed to a loss of popular confidence in the king and his government. Many Danes asked themselves whether Denmark even had any future as a sovereign nation at all, or whether it would soon be swallowed up by Prussia or one of its other larger, stronger neighbors. (Denmark did later regain about a fourth of its lost territory, but only in 1920.)

The 1800s were also a time when the population in Denmark started to explode, largely because of advances in medicine and agriculture. However, this growth in population was not matched by any growth in the standard of living of many Danes, who foresaw themselves becoming ever more impoverished. Other countries, and particularly the United States, seemed to promise a better life to enterprising young men and women than their homeland could hope to do. The United States, however,

had been ravaged by its own Civil War during the first half of the 1860s. Only after the end of that war, in 1865, did immigration to the United States from Denmark start to pick up much steam.

And so my father's grandparents left Denmark in 1868 and 1869, the young men by themselves, the young women with their parents and brothers. We will begin with the stories of the women, Marie and Elise Thrane, the two daughters of Jens Holm Thrane and his wife, Anna Katrina Wormsløv.

2
The Thrane Family

THE THRANES CAME from the north of Jutland, which is the peninsula that juts out from the European mainland, dividing the North Sea and the Baltic Sea from one another. They were one of the relatively few families in Denmark that had long had its own family name—what we now call a surname or "last name."[7]

Men with the surname Thrane begin to appear in official records in the late 1300s.[8] The earliest recorded Thranes lived in northern Jutland, in and around the ancient city of Viborg. They were not nobility, just officials of one or another sort: a bailiff (foged), a parish clerk (degn), a customs officer (tolder), and the like. Later generations of Thranes spread further northwards, across the Limfjord into Vendsyssel, and even across the the strait of Skagen (Skagarrak) into Norway.

"T[h]rane" is also the ordinary Danish word for the kind of bird called "crane" in English. Some of these early Thranes employed the image of a crane as their family symbol. Here is the coat of arms of one Christian Thrane, a King's Agent (ombudsmand) in the Norwegian city of Stavanger in 1616.[9]

[7] Surnames came into use in Denmark only at the very end of the Middle Ages. At first only the nobility had them, but later they were adopted by lesser folk, such as officials, clerics and some merchants and tradesmen. It was only as late as 1828 that common people were required by law to take surnames, and that law was strongly enforced only after my ancestors had left Denmark.

[8] Thrane and Trane are variant spellings of the same word and the same surname. Both spellings are pronounced the same, as /trān-ə/ (in two syllables, with the accent on the first syllable); the letter "h" is silent.

[9] Downloaded from https://forum.slaegt.dk/index.php?topic=154746.0

I can trace my own Thrane lineage only as far back as the 1700s, to Peder Thrane (born about 1725) and his son Jens Thrane, each of whom served in turn as parish clerk and schoolmaster in the town of Sindal, in Vendsyssel.[10]

One of Jens Thrane's sons, Christen Thrane, was apprenticed to a goldsmith in the city Hjørring. After completing his apprenticeship and becoming free to practice the trade on his own account, he settled in the town of Fladstrand (which was renamed Frederikshavn in 1818), on the coast of Jutland in the northeast. There he married Kirsten Marie Holm in 1823. They had five children, three boys and two girls.

Their first child was Jens Holm Thrane, my great-great-grandfather, born in Frederikshavn in 1824. As a boy, Jens was apprenticed to a carpenter, and he followed that trade for the rest of his life, in Denmark and also in the United States.

However, during the First Schleswig-Holstein War (1848-1851) Jens had to serve in the Danish army, and in 1850 he was stationed in Skælskør, the home city of the woman he would soon marry, Katrina Wormsløv. (Whether they met in that city or in Copenhagen is not known. In 1850 Katrina was already working as a servant girl in Copenhagen, but the two cities are not that distant from one another.)

Jens and Katrina married in Copenhagen on May 6, 1853, when he was 29 and she was 23 years old. They had their first child in Copenhagen a year later. Then they returned to Frederikshavn to raise their family.

Jens and Katrina had four more children in Frederikshavn over the next decade, but in 1864 (as noted above) Jutland was seized by Prussian troops, while Katrina was pregnant with their sixth child. As the Prussians advanced northward toward Frederikshavn, the Thranes fled their hometown, and took refuge in the town of Bronshøj, near Copenhagen, where their sixth child was born.

Jens and Katrina had seven children in all—their seventh was born in the United States—and all seven children lived to a ripe old age. This was no small achievement in those by-gone days.

Here is Katrina with five of her six children, taken in Denmark in 1865. In order of age, the children are Carl, Marie, Rudolph, Frants and Jens Jr. The child missing from the photograph is Elise, who falls between Rudolph and Frants in age. (This is the earliest photograph I have from my father's side of the family.)

[10] Peder Thrane was baptized in 1718 at Aalborg as the son of Jens Pe[de]rsen Thrane, about whom I have no other information. (Aalborg is about 30 miles south of Sindal, on the south side of the Limfjord.)

Anna Katrina (Wormsløv) Thrane with five of her six children

After Denmark's inglorious defeat in 1864, Jens and Katrina resolved to emigrate. Katrina and her six children crossed the Atlantic by steamship in May, 1868. Jens may have gone ahead to prepare their way; he is not listed with his family in their ship's passenger list. They landed in Quebec, and traveled overland—almost certainly by railroad—to Omaha, a city in Nebraska that already had a thriving community of recent immigrants from Denmark. Their last child, George, was born in Omaha in 1871.

The Thranes remained in Omaha only until about 1875, when they moved to San Francisco. Most likely they made that journey by rail, since the First Transcontinental Railway had recently been completed (in 1869), and its route ran directly from Omaha to Oakland (a city on the east shore of the San Francisco Bay).

In San Francisco, too, they found a thriving Danish immigrant community, and one that suited their tastes quite well. A Scandinavian society for dramatic and musical performance, called "Norden," had been founded in 1873; soon the Thrane's home at 739 Howard Street became the society's usual meeting-place.

Jens—now calling himself James when he spoke English—found ready work as a carpenter for various businesses. His four older sons, in their late 'teens and early twenties, had no difficulty earning their own livings. Carl (Charles in English) seems to have taken up his father's trade from the outset, and worked as a carpenter. The next two sons, Rudolph and Frants (Frank in English), worked in a cigar store, as Rudolph had already done in Omaha. Eventually they were able to start their own cigar store on 7th Street in the City, where they made and sold their own brands of cigars. The fourth son, Jens Jr. (James in English), still in his early 'teens, worked in a printing office at first. As he became older and more able, he joined his brothers in their cigar business, as did the fifth son, George, once he became old enough to work. (Nana told me that the cigars made by the Thranes were sold in boxes with a picture of a crane.)

With time, however, Frank left the cigar business and began to earn his living in other ways. At first he found work as a cooper, making wooden barrels for the California Barrel Company. Then in 1925 he leased a beachfront park and campsite ("New Brighton Park and Beach") at Soquel, a few miles south of Santa Cruz, which he and his wife ran for the rest of their active working life.

As the five brothers prospered in the later 1800s, one after another they all moved to more upscale homes on the East side of the Bay, in the cities of Alameda and Berkeley. Except for George, who was crippled and diabetic, the brothers all married and started families of their own.

The Thrane brothers, like very many men of their generation, were active in fraternal orders. They joined the Order of the Odd Fellows, and also a similar

Danish order, the Dania Society (Forening Dania), which had been founded in Alameda and Oakland in 1880.

The Thrane sisters, my father's two grandmothers, stayed at home with their parents. Elise most likely got to know her future husband, Martin William Mathiesen, during meetings of the society Norden at her home, for he served terms as its secretary and as its president.

Marie may have met her future husband, Frederick Christian Bender, there or elsewhere. Both her father and her husband-to-be were carpenters, and around the time of her marriage (in 1877) they were both working as railroad carbuilders for the same company, Kimball Carriage and Car Manufacturing Co.

Here is a formal photograph of the Thrane sisters as young women, not yet married. It was probably taken around 1874, when Elise would have been about 15 years old and Marie about 19. Elise is seated, Marie standing.

Elise and Marie Thrane

3
Katrina (Wormsløv) Thrane's Story

ABOUT HER OWN ANCESTRY, Katrina Wormsløv Thrane probably knew only what her mother had told her. She appears to have been her mother's only child. The soldier who had fathered her had died, or—more likely—abandoned his wife and child, not long after Katrina's birth; and her mother seems not to have kept in touch with her own family.

Records of Katrina's early life, before her marriage to Jens Holm Thrane in 1853, are very few. The Parish Registers for the city of Skælskør recorded the marriage of her parents Maren Nielsdatter (that is, "daughter of Niels"—she had no surname) and Christian Hansen Vormslev, a common soldier (krigskarl) and journeyman shoemaker from Aarhus, in November of 1829.[11] She was a widow, 38 years old; he was 43 years old. The same Parish Registers also recorded their daughter's birth not quite five months later, on April 17, 1830. She was baptized as Anna Katrina, and was called Katrina by her family and friends.

The next record we have of them comes from 1840. The census of that year finds Maren and Katrina living by themselves in impoverished circumstances; Maren is supporting them by selling bread. The next census, five years later, shows Katrina (15 years old) hard at work as a servant girl, while the mother is living nearby on alms. This is the last mention we find anywhere of Maren. By 1850 Katrina has moved to Copenhagen, where she is one of two servant girls in the household of a hat manufacturer from Prussia.

To her daughters and granddaughters, however, Katrina told and retold a poignant story that fills out these sparse records. *Her mother,* so Katrina said, *had been born into a Danish noble family, and in due time a considerable inheritance would have been hers. She had, however, fallen in love with a wandering carpenter—and she married him! Because she had married a commoner, by law all her inheritance was forfeit to the Danish Crown; and her family disowned her as well. After her husband died, she was thrown on her own resources. Somehow she was able to survive. Katrina was her only child.*

Romantic family stories such as this often turn out to be untrue. If there is any truth to this one, her mother's marriage to a commoner, and especially the forfeiture of her inheritance to the Crown, ought to have left traces somewhere in the State Archives

[11] Vormslev or Wormslev (in standard Danish, Ormslev) is a small village near Aarhus. Christian Hansen's surname almost certainly shows that his forbears came from that village. Why his wife chose to spell her new surname with a different vowel, Wormsløv, is not at all clear.

of Denmark.[12]

If I had to guess, the part of this story most likely to be true is that Maren Nielsdatter had become estranged from her family well before Katrina was born, possibly over Maren's choice of a husband in her first marriage. But even this much may simply have been a fiction, told to hide the actual circumstances of Katrina's conception and birth.

Here is Katrina again, early in 1907. She is 76 or 77 years old. With her are her daughter Marie, Marie's daughter Frances (my grandmother) and Frances's daughter Thelma (my aunt): four generations of descent in the direct female line. My grandmother cherished this photograph.

"The Four Generations"

[12] I have no idea how one might even begin to look for those traces, especially with so little to identify Katrina's mother. Her given name, Maren (or, more formally, Marie), is perhaps the most common female given name in Denmark, and her patronymic, Nielsdatter, is not a particularly rare one either. We do not know where Maren was born, nor do we have an exact date for her birth—around 1790 is all we can infer from her age.

Katrina would live for another six years or so, until late in 1913. She would see the birth of at least two more great-grandchildren, my uncle in 1908 and my father in 1911. Her obituary in the San Francisco Danish newspaper, *Bien,* fondly recalls how in days gone by her home had been the meeting place of the Danish society Norden, and how "many memories of that time are joined to [her] family and home."[13]

[13] *Bien,* 31 October 1913, p. 5.

4
The Mathiesen Family

THE SURNAME MATHIESEN was originally just a patronymic, borne by the sons of every man named Mathias; it simply means "son of Mathias." Similarly, daughters of every man named Mathias bore the patronymic Mathiedatter, "daughter of Mathias." As the 1800s rolled on, however, individual families in Denmark slowly began to use the husband's current patronymic as their family surname. My ancestors began using Mathiesen as a surname only in the generation which gave birth to my immigrant great-grandfather, Martin William Mathiesen, and his siblings.

I cannot trace my Mathiesen ancestors as far back as I can my Thrane ancestors. The earliest ones I can be sure of were two of the grandparents of Martin William Mathiesen. They were Mathias Mouritzsen and Marie Christiansdatter, both living in the very small village Nørre Kollemorten.[14] Their son, Christian Mathiesen, was born there in 1822. Twelve years later, the 1834 census lists their son as a foster child, age 13, in the house of an elderly widow in the same town.

Sometime in his late 'teens, Christian Mathiesen went to Copenhagen and joined the Danish army. The census of 1845 lists him as a junior rifleman (underjæger) in the First Rifle Corps (Første Jægercorps) of the Danish army.

After leaving the military, Christian found work as a carpenter. In 1849 he married Anna Elisabeth Lund from Stepping (in south Jutland, in Haderslev County). He was about 28 years old, she was about 20. They lived in Copenhagen and had six children over the next eleven years, four boys and two girls.

Anna Elisabeth's mother, Elsbe Lund, had never bothered to get married, but she bore eight children out of wedlock. For a time she and her younger children lived in the house of the elderly widower who was the father of five of her children (but not of Anna Elisabeth). After he died, Elsbe and her youngest child went into the parish poorhouse.

Anna Elisabeth was Elsbe's next-to-last child, born in 1829. By the time Anna was 15 years old, she had left Stepping and begun to support herself by working as a servant girl, first in the city Haverslev, then in Copenhagen, where she would meet her husband-to-be.

My great-grandfather, Martin William Mathiesen, was Christian and Anna's first child; their other sons were Oliver, Rinas and Charles. Their daughters were Doris and Elsebeth, but Elsebeth died before she was one year old.

[14] Nørre Kollemorten was a very small village not too far from the city Vejle, in south Jutland.

Like many young men from Copenhagen in those days, Martin and Oliver went to sea. Oliver (as Nana had heard) was lost at sea. His sister Doris eventually named her first-born in his memory, Oliver; Martin's first-born was a girl, so one of her given names was Olivia.

Martin had better luck. He had signed onto a whaling ship while still in his 'teens, and it was on that ship that he happened to come to San Francisco, by way of the hard passage around Cape Horn. That was in 1869, when he was 18 years old. There (as I wrote above) he jumped ship and settled down as a landsman. Soon he found work as a salesman for a wholesale house that dealt in harnesses and other horse-tack. For the rest of his working life he supported his family as a salesman and a commercial traveler, specializing in all sorts of leather goods.

His heart, however, lay not so much in sales as in music and theater. He was a regular member of the choruses that sang on stage in productions by the San Francisco Opera Company. He also joined Norden, the Scandinavian music and drama society in San Francisco; at various times he even served as its secretary and as its president. The Thrane family, too, were members of Norden, and in its early years the society held its regular meetings in the Thrane house in San Francisco.

Undoubtedly it was at these meetings that one of the Thrane daughters, Elise, caught Martin's eye. They were married sometime in 1878 or 1879, when she was about 19 years old and he about 27, and he had already become somewhat prosperous. The newlyweds promptly moved from San Francisco to Alameda, a city across the Bay, and commenced having children.

After living in Alameda for about 15 years, they pulled up stakes again and moved to Portland, Oregon. Portland had only recently acquired an easy railroad connection with the rest of the United States, through the Stampede Pass railroad tunnel, and it was ripe for commercial growth. (Work on the tunnel was finished in 1895.) They spent most of the rest of their days in Portland, although they did return to San Francisco for a year or two right after the great earthquake and fire of 1906. (They may not originally have meant to live in Portland indefinitely. Martin kept up his membership in his California Masonic Lodge [Oak Grove Lodge #215, F. & A. M., in Alameda] at least until 1899.[15])

Martin's other two brothers and his sister had also eventually emigrated from Denmark and settled in the San Francisco Bay area—Doris in 1877, Charles in 1880, and Rinas in 1883.

Doris married another immigrant from Denmark, John F. Rasmussen, soon after her arrival. They had four children, and supported themselves by running a small

[15] The annual *Proceedings* of the Grand Lodge of California list the current active members of each lodge. I have been able to view them online only up to 1899.

newspaper store in Oakland. (John died in 1895, and Doris carried on their business by herself.)

Rinas (who spelled his name Renas in English, to keep its pronunciation the same) never married. He was a teamster, back in the days when every truck was pulled by a team of horses. In 1901, during one of the frequent strikes in those days, he went into a saloon for a drink after his day's work. Union men there recognized him as a strike-breaker, set upon him and beat him savagely, and left him in the street for dead. He eventually regained consciousness and made his way home, where he lived with his widowed mother. He had been severely injured, and he died at home a few days later.

Charles seems to have left very few traces in the records available to me.[16] His death certificate (Nogales, Arizona, 1942) says that he had moved to Arizona around 1896, that he had worked as blacksmith and a boilermaker, and that he was a retired railroad man. He had been married (to Hilda Lunberg), but was divorced.

Their father, Christian Mathiesen, had died back in Copenhagen sometime between 1880 and 1885. (Nana said that he had been murdered.) In 1890 his widow, Anna Elisabeth, left Denmark for the San Francisco Bay area, where she lived with her son Renas until his death. She died in 1905, just days after her 77th birthday.

Martin and Elise had eleven children in the course of their marriage. Seven of them—two boys and five girls—lived to adulthood, married, and had children and grandchildren of their own. The first five of their children were born in California, the last two in Oregon. All but one of their children married in Oregon and had children and grandchildren there. (Nana knew their names, but not much about their later lives. She had not kept in close touch with them over the years.)

Here is Elise (on the viewer's left) with her married daughter Emma and two of her daughter's in-laws:

[16] His Danish given name *Charles,* borrowed from English or French, is pronounced *Karlis* in Danish, and it can be spelled like it is pronounced, even in records kept in English. (Sometimes it can even be written as *Carlos* in the United States, under the influence of Spanish). This makes it harder to track the man through the available records.

Elise (Thrane) Mathiesen, Emma Mathiesen and two of Emma's in-laws

And here is Martin William Mathiesen with one of his grandchildren, almost certainly my aunt Thelma, who was born in 1906.

Martin William Mathiesen with a grandchild

5
James Christian Mathiesen [Sr.]

THE ONE CHILD WHO RETURNED TO CALIFORNIA as soon as he could was their older son, my grandfather. He was named James Christian Mathiesen—James after his mother's father and Christian after his father's father. He was born in 1881, and he was still in his early 'teens when his family moved to Oregon. By 1900, when he was only 18, he had already begun to work for his living in Portland. His chosen trade was a new trade, that of electrician.

Shortly thereafter James returned to the San Francisco Bay area, to be closer to the woman he would soon marry. She was Frances Eda Bender, and she was a daughter of his mother's sister, Marie (Thrane) Bender.

Here is photograph of James about the time he came back to the San Francisco Bay area:[17]

James Christian Mathiesen [Sr.] as a young man

[17] It got damaged when Nana removed it from her album for me.

In 1905, when James was 23 and Frances was 17, they were able to marry at last. They made their home in Berkeley.

The San Francisco Call wrote up their wedding (in the issue for July 24, 1905), which was deemed newsworthy for its complete lack of ceremony:

Bridegroom in Berkeley Scorns Conventions of Matrimonial Ceremony.

BERKELEY, July 23.— Indifferent to the tradition that decrees at least a small proportion of romance in all weddings, James Mathesen, a lineman and electrician of Berkeley, climbed down from a telegraph pole yesterday afternoon at 5 o'clock, walked in his working clothes to the real estate office of W. P. Albee on Center street and there met Miss Frances Bender, a typist in Mr. Albee's employ.

"All ready, Frances?" queried Mr. Mathesen of Miss Bender.

"Yes," laconically replied the typist.

"Then we'll go and be married," quoth Mr. Matheson—and it was even so.

To the home of Rev. Mr. Hodgkins, curate of St. Mark's Episcopal Church, went the young man, with his bride to be, and there the curate pronounced the words that wedded the two.

"We will now," said the sagacious Mr. Mathesen, "procure a fine, large, succulent beefsteak and adjourn to 1844 University avenue."

The beefsteak was purchased, the streetcar carried the couple to their home, the dinner was prepared at once and there alone they had the wedding feast.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Mathesen smiled when asked to explain their choice of so unromantlc a wedding tour, but each protested that "It makes little difference, so long as you're married."

The groom will continue at his work as a lineman. Mrs. Mathesen will remain a typist. They prefer it that way.[18]

Since the bride and groom were first cousins, serious obstacles were placed in the way of their courtship, at least by the bride's mother. (Marriages between first cousins have always been legal in California, though they have been widely regarded as scandalous both in the United States and in Europe.)

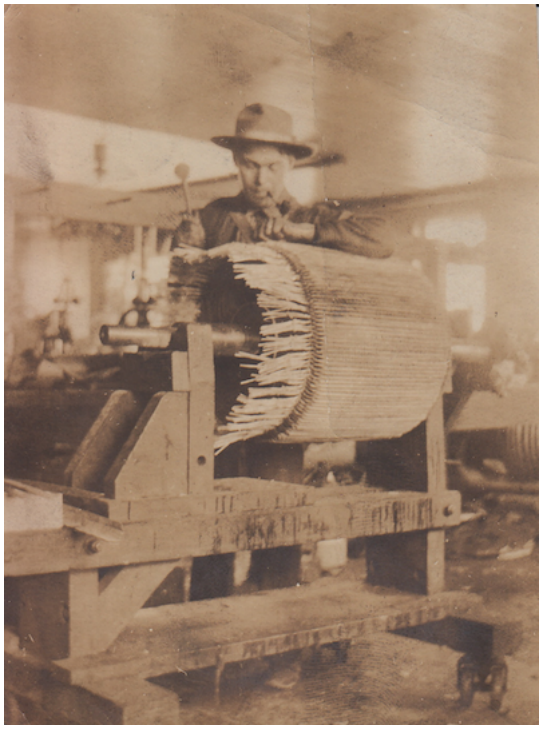
As Nana told the story, she knew at a very young age that she wanted to marry her cousin James. Because of this, her mother had forbidden her even to so much as speak with James. When her mother did find her talking with her cousin over the fence one day, she flew into a rage and ordered Nana to gather up her clothes and

[18] The creative misspellings of "Mathiesen" are in the original article.

leave the house—"I never want to see you again!" Nana asked for a common paper bag to carry her clothes as she left, but her mother refused her even that much. So she took her clothes in her arms, and she turned to her cousin for help. James took her to a nearby butcher shop, where he begged a piece of butcher paper for her to wrap her clothes in. Then he and his relatives helped her find a place to live, and also to find work to support herself until she turned 16 and became old enough to marry without her parents' consent.

In the event, they got married in 1905, shortly before Nana turned 18. They had six very happy years together, punctuated by the birth of their three children in 1906, 1908 and 1911. Nana remembered her husband as a very kind man. She told me how every day, after dinner, he would tell her to sit down and rest from her housework, while he would do the dishes and clean up the kitchen and dining room.

Soon James found a better position in the electrical shop of the Otis Elevator Company, and began to call himself an electrical engineer. He had a lively and inventive mind, and came up with a new design for a rotary steam engine, on which he was planning to apply for a patent.[19] He also (according to Nana) invented a leveling device for Otis Elevator that could align the car at the threshold of each floor. Here he is at work in the company's electrical shop:



James Christian Mathiesen [Sr.] at work

[19] United States Patent Office, Patent No. 1,106,882, patented on August 11, 1914.

Then in October, 1911, James contracted typhoid fever from some contaminated food he ate, and he died. His wife was left a widow with three small children to raise largely on her own. (My father, her youngest child, was about six months old at the time.)

James [Sr.] had been a member of one of the less well-known fraternal orders, the United Ancient Order of Druids of California (Norma Grove No. 5).[20] In those days one of the main reasons why men joined fraternal orders was for the help they gave to widows and orphans of their members, but a small fraternal order such as U. A. O. D. could only offer a modest amount of help. Nor were Nana's own parents able to help her all that much in her time of need, even though she and her mother had become reconciled by then. Her late husband's family was far away in Oregon at the time, and they could not be of much help either.

So Nana went to work again. Her mother, Marie (Thrane) Bender, took care of her children during the hours when Nana was at work, but all the years of living with her rascal of a husband, Frederick Christian Bender (see below), had pretty well dried up Marie's reserves of compassion and kindness, and my father did not like her very much.

I have one final story to tell about James [Sr.] and his father Martin. Our surname, Mathiesen, is usually pronounced in Danish as it is spelled, in four syllables with the accent on the second syllable: Mah-TEE-eh-sen. Martin continued to pronounce it in the Danish manner even in the United States. His son, however, spoke English more often than Danish, and had long since accommodated his own pronunciation to the norms of English; he called himself MATH-uh-sun. There was a time when Martin was in San Francisco on business, and thought he would visit his son at work in the electrical shop. He asked for James Mah-TEE-eh-sen, and was met with blank incomprehension ... until one of the workers asked, "Oh, do you mean James MATH-uh-sen?" Martin replied, "Well, if that's what he's calling himself now, I'm not sure I want to see him!" I suppose they met anyway that day, since the story has come down to me.

Here is the last photograph ever taken of James [Sr.], with his wife and their three children (Thelma, Marshall and James):

[20] *The San Francisco Call,* 7 October 1911, p. 14. Other men among my ancestors were Freemasons, Odd Fellows, or Woodsmen of the World. James [Sr.] was the only Druid among them.

James Christian Mathiesen [Sr.] with his wife and children, 1911

6
Frances Eda (Bender) Mathiesen
"Nana"

THE NEXT FEW YEARS WERE VERY HARD ONES for Nana, but she proved up to their challenges:

"A woman does what she must for her children, and there's no reproach to her for that."

Nana soon found a low-paying job as a ticket-taker in a seaside amusement park called Neptune Beach in Alameda. My father could just remember playing among her skirts on the floor of the ticket booth, out of sight of the customers. Not too long thereafter, she was recruited as a dime-a-dance girl by the proprietor of a waterfront "ballroom dance studio" that catered to sailors.

This man was called "Daddy" Rice (Charles A. Rice), and Nana always spoke very highly of him. She said that he never required any of the girls to do anything other than dance with the sailors who came to the studio. (This may give some idea of what most dime-a-dance girls had to do in most waterfront "dance studios" at the time.) Even so, the contrast could not have been more distasteful for her, between her late, kind and much-loved husband, and the drunken sailors who patronized these waterfront dance studios, not so much to dance as to hold a woman in their arms for the length of the dance. She never had much taste for men and for their ways after those years in the "dance studio," and she made no bones about saying so. Daddy Rice was a rare exception.

Daddy Rice's wife was insane and confined to an asylum, so Nana eventually took their young son, Gladford Rice, into her own home and raised him alongside of her own children for some years. (Nana also had hoped that she and Daddy Rice might marry, but he remained loyal to his insane wife and would not divorce her—which only made Nana respect him more than ever. She kept his picture on her bedside table ever after, even during the years of her second marriage.)

It may have been Daddy Rice who eventually helped Nana get a far better job than any he was able to offer her. In 1922 she was hired as a bookkeeper by a well-connected man, James A. Munro, who owned a profitable auction house in Oakland. Mr. Munro also peddled political influence, fenced stolen goods, bribed the Public Administrator to get all the richest intestate estates into his own hands for auction, rigged his auctions to benefit himself and his cronies, and generally did whatever he found profitable without much regard for the law. (This was Oakland, where if one "squared" the right highly placed people, paid off the police, and kept up a false front of a respectable legality, one could earn a very good living.) Nana's original job was to keep the two sets of company books—the true books that no outsider

would ever get to see, and the false books that could be inspected at any time by the authorities. By 1927 she had moved up within Mr. Munro's company to become his office manager as well as his bookkeeper.

Mr. Munro's payroll included a few strong-arm men whose job it was to beat, and sometimes to kill, people who got too much in his way. (Of course, the pay of the strong-arm men would be entered only in the true books, not the false ones.) As Nana told the story, these men were not chosen for their intelligence. One of them happened to notice a spectacular diamond stickpin that a client of Mr. Munro's, a rich Jewish pawnbroker, wore in his necktie, and he decided to take it for himself. So one night he waylaid the pawnbroker as he was leaving Mr. Munro's office, murdered him, and took the stickpin with its great diamond. When the body was found, there were clues that made it easy for the police to find and arrest the murderer.

From his jail cell the man sent a runner to Mr. Munro, begging for help:
— *"They say I murdered him, and they're going to hang me. Get me out of here!"*
Mr. Munro came down to the jail to see for himself, and their private conversation went something like this:
— *"Well, did you do it?"*
— *"Well, yes, I did, but what's that got to do with anything? You have to get me out of here! They're going to hang me."*
— *"And why shouldn't you be hanged?"*
— *"What? .....* [stunned silence] *..... Please! Look, I'll even give you the diamond if you get me out of here. I buried it on Rich Man's Hill, and I'll show you where if you get me out of here."*
— *"Well now! I have plenty of diamonds already, and I can get as many more as I want. You won't be giving me that diamond. What you'll be giving me will be worth far more to me than any big diamond. You're going to give me an example for my other men, so they won't dare to mess with my clients the way you did. You're going to hang! And I'm going to make sure that all my men know why."*

With that, Mr. Munro left the jail. They hanged the man—after a trial, of course. One had to keep up a front of respectable legality ... even in Oakland.

The way Nana told the story, the diamond was still there somewhere, buried on Rich Man's Hill, which in those days had no buildings on it at all.[21]

My father and his brother went looking for that diamond in their 'teen years, as did I in mine. We never found it. Now that I'm older and less naïve, I doubt that the diamond stayed buried on Rich Man's Hill for long. It would have been so easy for Mr. Munro to string the murderer along until he found out precisely where the

[21] "Rich Man's Hill" was the hill that is now called Albany Hill. Before Albany was set off as a city, that hill was in the city of Richmond, and its name was Richmond Hill. Nana knew which hill it was, but she thought it had taken its name from the rich murdered pawnbroker.

diamond had been buried, and then go out to the hill some night and dig it up for himself.

In the fullness of time Mr. Munro died, on July 30, 1934. Nana had a telephone at home by then, which was paid for by Mr. Munro's company, in case of urgent company business. Late one night that phone rang unexpectedly.

Mrs. Munro (Maud A. Henderson) was on the other end of the line: "Frances, the old man has just died and there will be an audit. I want you to go down to the office right now. Get the true books from the safe and bring them to my house so I can keep them from the auditors."

So Nana put her business clothes on and walked a few miles through the streets to Mr. Munro's warehouse, where the office was. (In those days a respectably dressed woman could run errands by herself at night without much risk. No doubt she also had a hatpin in her hat, too, where she could get at it easily.) When she got to the warehouse, she found that Mr. Munro's men had already heard of their boss's death, and they were looting the warehouse by torchlight. But these men knew her, and she knew them, and she passed through them safely. She went into the office, closed the door, opened the great safe, and took out the true books.

And then, as Nana told the story, she sat there, wrestling with herself in thought. For there in front of her, in the open safe, was a cardboard box. And she was pretty sure that she was the only person on earth, now that Mr. Munro was dead, who knew that box was there, and also knew what was inside it.

That box was full of loose cut diamonds and other gemstones, large and small. It was Mr. Munro's emergency fund, in case he ever had to leave the country suddenly. Nana was sure that Mr. Munro's plans for that eventuality did not include Mrs. Munro, who (she also was sure) knew nothing of that cardboard box and its contents.

Nana sat there a while, thinking hard. On the one hand, it would be stealing to take any of those stones ... or would it? She had always felt underpaid for her services to the firm, and she had resented it. On the other hand, taking some of those stones would not be very risky. Even if she was mistaken and Mrs. Munro actually did know about the box in the safe, how could she know just how many stones it held?

In the end, Nana took only two of the very smallest loose diamonds. She put the box back in the safe, closed it, took the true books to Mrs. Munro at her house, and went home.

You might think that Nana would sell those diamonds someday, when she needed extra cash. But she never did. Perhaps she took them more as a symbol, to settle accounts with Mr. Munro at last, than as a hedge against any hard times that the future might bring.

Those two diamonds came down in the family. One is now in my wife's engagement ring, and the other in the engagement ring of my brother's wife. They are very small diamonds indeed.

7
Edmund F. Petersen
"Baba"

MR. MUNRO'S AUCTION HOUSE was a substantial firm, employing many men. One of them was a buyer named Edmund F. Petersen, who quite fancied Nana. In the end she was persuaded to marry him ***not*** because she loved him—she did not!—but because her boys liked him a lot and she thought he would be a good influence on them during their later 'teen years. They got married on April 16, 1925. My father was not quite 14 at the time, and his brother had just turned 17. I called him "Baba," which means "grandfather."

Baba was also a Dane, born in Copenhagen in 1886. He had left home and gone to sea around 1899, when he was 13 years old, and he had a sailor's tattoo of his initials on his right forearm to show for it.[22]

By that time most of the ships Baba might have signed onto were powered by steam engines, which required a different set of skills from their crews than sailing ships did. It was almost certainly on these steamships that he got all his considerable skill with machines and the tools needed to service them. When I knew Baba (very much later), he had a way with tools, and could make or repair almost anything. He put up a building for a large garage and workshop almost entirely by himself, with a few men to help only with the heaviest work, such as putting the roof trusses into place. He also built a fine wooden rowboat all by himself.

In 1906, when he was about 20 years old, Baba left the sea for good, and emigrated to the United States, entering the country through the port of New York. His entry in the immigration records of Ellis Island gives his trade as "mechanician," that is, mechanic.

Yet Baba must have missed the sea at least a little in his heart. When I knew him, his dearest possession was a fine brass ship's-bell clock, that rang the bells from 1 to 8, every half hour on the half hour, in the course of each successive four-hour shipboard watch.

As Nana told it, once Baba came to the United States, he worked for a while in a carnival, which is probably how he made his way across the country. His mechanical skills would have been valued there, since most carnivals were using trucks instead of horses by then. But he probably also worked on the midway,

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[22] These sailor's tattoos are to help identify your body, if it is recovered after you drown. Your face is the first part of your drowned body that gets eaten and becomes impossible to recognize. Your forearm holds out longer against the ravages of the sea. Baba's full name was originally Frederic Edmund Ernest Petersen, and his tattoo read F E P.

taking the marks for all they were worth in the crooked games. He certainly knew how to do amazing things with playing cards: you could take a new deck, shuffle it and hand it to him, and he could immediately deal you any cards you cared to name from that shuffled deck.

By 1913 Baba had gotten as far as California, where he found work as an actor and a stuntman in the early days of the silent films in Hollywood, working for some of the early studios.[23] In those days, as Nana told it, the pay for a day's work doing the most risky stunts was $5 and a steak dinner—*if you survived!* You had to gimmick your risky stunts yourself. If you were to drive a car off a cliff, for example, it was up to you personally to fix up the car door so it would break away instantly in the very few seconds you had for rolling out of the car off-camera, right before it went over the edge of cliff. If you didn't get it just right, you went over the cliff with the car, and you died. Baba must have got it just right every time, since he lived to tell the tale.

Baba worked in films for a year or two, in 1913 and 1914. Then he set himself up as an auto mechanic and driver for a few more years in Los Angeles.

In 1917 Baba came north to Oakland. Somewhere he had met and married a younger sister of Mr. Munro (Maude Ethel Munro), though their marriage did not last very long. Once he got to Oakland, he started working for Mr. Munro, first as a salesman and then as a furniture buyer. He remained a buyer until Mr. Munro died. During the next year or so, while Mrs. Munro was shutting down the firm, he served as its general manager. By then, of course, he was married to Nana, the firm's office manager.

It was in Mr. Munro's auction house that he learned another set of skills, the skills needed to work as an auctioneer. He learned how to test the fineness of gold by ringing it against his teeth, or by applying nitric acid to it. He learned how to spot secret compartments and hidden drawers built into old furniture. He learned how to pick locks and open safes (even if he didn't have the combination). He learned how to rig auctions, using shills to place false bids. No doubt he also learned other unusual or dark skills in Mr. Munro's firm. And of course he learned all the open skills of an auctioneer: how to prepare the lots for sale, how to keep the books, how to get the bids rolling and keep them moving fast, how to know just when it was best to close the bidding on each item, and so forth. So far as I could judge as a teenage boy, he seemed to me to be very good at all these things.

After Mr. Munro had died and his firm had been closed down, Nana and Baba set up an auction house of their own. Nana had had enough of the worry and stress that came with managing a crooked firm, so she insisted that they run a straight auction house. There would be no bribes to the public administrator to get the most

[23] The *Los Angeles City Directory* for 1914, p. 1800, lists him as "PETERSON, Edmund actor Universal Film Co r[esidence] Venice". (The company itself is listed as "UNIVERSAL Film Mfg Co (Pac Coast Studios)" on p. 2209.)

profitable estates to auction off, no shills to place fake high bids on choice items (which might be resold later at a considerable profit by the house), no double sets of true and false books, no strong-arm men, nothing at all of that sort. Because of this, they never prospered all that much from the very hard work of their auction house—they could get by, but only just.

Sometimes, however, there was an unexpected windfall from one of these estate sales. There was a time when he and some helpers were unloading furniture, and Baba noticed that one corner of a four-poster bed seemed significantly heavier than the other three. After his helpers had left, he took a closer look at that bed, and he discovered that the finial at the top of the heavier post could be unscrewed. Under it he found a deep hole that had been bored down the height of the post. In that hole was hidden a tall stack of "double eagles," that is, $20 gold coins. I don't suppose that he ever reported these coins to the public administrator.

Baba was a 32° Freemason in the Scottish Rite, and also a Shriner (that is, a member of the Masonic organization called The Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine, which is well known for the network of free Hospitals for Children which it maintains).

8
Frederick Christian Bender

MY FATHER'S OTHER GRANDFATHER was named Frederik Christian Bender. He was far and away the most *colorful* of my Danish forebears—*colorful* is putting it quite mildly! He was Nana's father.

He was born in the city Næstved, on the largest of the Danish islands (Zealand), about 50 miles from Copenhagen, a few days before Christmas in 1841. His mother was Danish, but his father was a German who had come there from Hamburg, and worked as a master carpenter. As a young man he went to Copenhagen and joined the army, obtaining a post as a soldier in the Danish Royal Guard (Den Kongelige Livgarde). Here he is in the uniform of the Royal Guard, sometime in his twenties:

Frederik Christian Bender

Members of the Royal Guard were required to be six feet tall at the minimum; Nana said he was quite a bit taller than that.

In 1869, however, Frederik found it necessary to leave Denmark in a great hurry. The story that he told his family in the United States bears no resemblance at all to the circumstances remembered in Denmark.

As he told the story, he was a young man too fond of drink, song and women, so he often stayed up much later than he ought to. After one such night, while he was standing guard in front of the Royal Palace, he dozed off—and then woke up suddenly in pain, for it felt to him as though someone was kicking him hard with a heavy boot. So he drew his saber and slashed at his assailant. Then he woke up more fully, and saw instantly that he had no future of any sort in Denmark. For there in front of him stood his sergeant with blood running down his face from several saber cuts. So he ran away, and within minutes he was on the first ship he could find out of Copenhagen harbor for anywhere.

There is a second part of his story, too. Years later he had occasion to be in Hamburg, a city in Germany just south of Denmark, on business about an inheritance. (His father had come to Denmark from Hamburg.) He was staying at an inn, and while seated at the bar, he noticed a man staring intently at him—a man with most impressive facial scars. But he did not realize who that man was until he came over and asked my great-grandfather, "Is your name Bender?" It was his sergeant, the man whose face he had cut with his saber so many years ago!

Great-grandfather was hardly ever afraid of anything, but at that moment fear took hold of him. As it turned out, however, after so many years his sergeant no longer had any hard feelings. This was back in the day when young men dueled with sharpened sabers for sport and to prove their manhood. The scars that great-grandfather had given his sergeant were truly impressive, and looked like dueling scars. On the strength of these scars and the manhood they implied, the sergeant had been able to cut quite a wide swath through the young women of Copenhagen, and this had softened his anger at my great-grandfather. So they shared a few companionable drinks, and went their separate ways the next morning.

However ... a number of decades ago a Danish descendant of my great-grandfather got in touch with me, and told me what she had heard about his over-hasty departure from Denmark. It seems that Frederik had gotten her great-great-grandmother, Abelone Larsen, pregnant. Once her condition became certain, he was compelled to marry her, on July 6, 1869. He then went to her father and begged a large sum of money to buy a house in Copenhagen for the two of them to live in and raise their child. As soon as he had that money, however, he used it to book passage to the United States, on July 13 of that same year. Abelone never saw him again. After the statutory seven years had passed she obtained a divorce. She never remarried, and her only child was my Danish cousin's great-grandmother.

The Danish record of his emigration specifies that he planned to go to Chicago, and he may indeed have gone there at first. The 1870 U. S. census for Chicago includes "Frederick Benter," carriage maker, though his birthplace is given as Baden (in Germany). Soon, however, he went to San Francisco, probably by way of the Transcontinental Railroad that carried so many Danes from Omaha to San Francisco Bay.

Frederik had qualified as a master carpenter in Denmark, before he joined the Royal Guard. His journeyman's passbook shows him traveling from one master carpenter to another in Denmark and North Germany during the years 1861–1864. After he came to California, he sometimes specified his occupation as carpenter, sometimes as car-builder. In the 1880s most of his work was for the cable-car companies of San Francisco, including the Kimball Carriage and Car Manufacturing Company, the Clay Street Hill Railroad Company, the Sutter Street Railroad Company (where he eventually became foreman of the car shop), and the California Street Railway Company. In the later 1880s he also went to the Hawai'ian Islands to help build the first railroad there. Around 1905 he also worked briefly for the Southern Pacific Railroad Co.

In the 1890s, Frederick (as he spelled his name in English) became infected with "gold fever," which was soon heightened by the discovery of major gold fields up north in the later 1890s, first in the Klondike, and then around Nome, Alaska. He had already prospected for gold in Siskiyou and in San Luis Obispo Counties, where the gold fields were less productive, but still worth a skilled miner's time and labor. So around 1897 he traveled by schooner to Alaska, and spent a number of months as a prospector there. Here are three old photographs from that time of his life:

Frederick Christian Bender *(the taller bearded man)*
with two fellow miners and their pet bear cub

Frederick Christian Bender *(left)* working at the sluice

The schooner that got them there

A man could make money by mining gold, but often he could make more money for less labor by selling supplies to miners and providing entertainment for them ... and even more money, for even less work, by playing off their hopes of getting rich quickly. In 1896 my great-grandfather cooked up a scheme of the last sort, and narrowly escaped being lynched as a result. Here is an newspaper account of how his scheme played out (*The San Francisco Call,* October 4, 1896):

VANISHED THEIR DREAM OF GOLD.
How a Brave Little Band of Miners Failed in Alaska.
They Fitted Out an Expedition Last April, but Cooks Inlet Fooled Them.

RETURN OF THE PROSPER.
Disgruntled Miners Who Are Not Chary of Murmurs Against Their Recent Chief.

The eighteen men who purchased shares in the little schooner Prosper and went on a gold-hunting expedition last April got back home yesterday.

They are very bitter against the man who induced them to mortgage their homes and use other means of raising money in order to reach the new El Dorado, and should they lay hands on him there will be trouble. The statement of the returned gold-miners is as follows:

Last winter a man named F. C. Bender of Berkeley advertised for a party of men to go to the Alaskan goldfields. In answer to inquiries he informed applicants that he would take them to a claim in Alaska that would pay good dividends, if not a small fortune. Eighteen of us paid him $100 apiece each for a share in his schooner Prosper, in addition to paying for the provisions and outfit.

We sailed from San Francisco April 6, but stress or weather compelled us to put into Drakes Bay twice. Owing to dissatisfaction we returned to San Francisco April 19 and engaged Captain Robert Quinton in lieu of Captain Holm and sailed again on April 26. We encountered nearly all head winds and gales until May 27, when we anchored near Point Steele, Alaska, and prospected for two days and found nothing. Bender then informed us that his great secret place was Resurrection Bay, to which place we proceeded, arriving June 1. We prospected all around and found nothing. Bender then coolly informed us that there was nothing there. We then deposed him from the management of the business and elected F. E. Corder manager. We then proceeded to Turnagain Arm, Cooks Inlet, and landed after a protracted and desperate battle with the mosquitoes.

We found the whole country located, but there were plenty of claims to be leased or purchased. We also found hundreds of idle men and millions of busy mosquitoes, but no gold.

Bender had tried secretly to divide the party and abandon the others and start out with two or three of the men on his own account; his scheme did not work, whereupon he abandoned us altogether.

After prospecting all around the country we finally leased a claim of Martin Chester, on Resurrection Creek, where we turned the stream and worked the river bed for one week, sluicing, but we found practically nothing.

Discouraged and disgusted we then determined to return home. We left Hope City on August 8 with a number of passengers for Sitka. We encountered head winds and a succession of southeast gales, the most of which occurred on August 29 and 30. We rigged out a sea drag and hove to under bare poles for twenty hours. For the first six hours the wind blew with hurricane force.

Captain Quinton, who had weathered many hurricanes, says he never experienced such a gale. But our schooner acted splendidly and not a single sea broke on board.

We reached Sitka on September 6 and left for San Francisco September 11 with fine weather but head winds all the time, and arrived in due time safe and sound.
We owe our most grateful thanks to Captain Quinton, who brought us through all right.

F. E. Corder, H. C. Shock, C. R. Olsen, John F. Voyler, C. Christensen, A. F. Platner, A. E. Corder.

F. C. Bender, a prosperous carpenter, living on University avenue, near Sacramento street, conceived the idea of the expedition and succeeded in getting seven other citizens of Oakland and Berkeley interested in the scheme. These seven men were F. E. Corder, a foreman in the employ of the Judson Company; H. C. Shook, an Oakland route-agent for a San Francisco newspaper; Charles Olsen, an employe of the Judson Company; John F. Voyler, an Oaklander; O. Christensen, a San Francisco wharfinger; A. F. Platner, another Oakland man, and A. E. Corder, also of the Judson Company. There were eleven others who became copartners in the scheme.

After prospecting for a while they became discouraged and disgusted, and finally set sail for home, leaving Hope City on August 8. They reached Sitka on September 6, and left for San Francisco on the 11th, arriving here last night.

Bender has been in the City for nearly two months. On one occasion the miners held a meeting and threatened to lynch him, so he made his escape and came to San Francisco. There is now sure to be litigation, as

> the miners hold the controlling interest, and Bender, as the holder of a one-third interest, is listed as managing owner.

The same scam of was also recorded, briefly, in the published autobiography of Captain Quinton:[24]

> This was not to be my last experience with incompetent companions. [...] Still later another imposter, named B., who claimed that he had a gold mine in Alaska, persuaded a number of men to join him in an expedition and engaged me as captain of his vessel, the *Prosper.* He narrowly escaped hanging when his fraud was discovered. He deserted his ship and party to save his own skin, and after our men had had enough of mining ventures we made our way back to San Francisco without the owner. I have always kept as a souvenir of that voyage a testimonial with which the men of the party closed a newspaper account of their experiences and of B.'s rascalities:
>
> "We desire to return our public thanks to Captain Quinton for our safe return. We had no chronometer and not a single sailor in the party to assist him, and the card compass which we had proved to be so unreliable that we were obliged to steer by a little pocket compass. We encountered several strong gales and the weather was so foggy that he was obliged to go for weeks at a time without being able to get an astronomical observation, but he brought us through safe and sound."
>
> It was really a foolhardy enterprise to undertake such a voyage in so frail a vessel, for she went to Alaska again with a professional crew on board, but was wrecked in a gale and drowned all hands.

Frederick married Marie Thrane in 1877, very late in October. He was almost 36 years old at the time, and she was 22. (He probably did not know, or care, whether he was still legally married to Abelone Larsen back in Denmark.) They had six children, five of whom lived to adulthood: Richard, Frederick [Jr.], Frances (Nana, my grandmother), Ardella, and Alma.

Their marriage was a very stormy one. The stories I have already told have probably given you some idea of their respective characters. Here are two other stories to round out the picture.

In the 1890s Frederick was often away from home, prospecting for gold elsewhere in California or in Alaska. Nana, who had been born in 1887 and was still very much a girl in those years, told me once how whenever her father came home, back from the gold fields, he would wait a few days, and then get up in the small hours of the morning, boil a great amount of water on the stove, and carry it out to the garden

[24] Robert Quinton, *The Strange Adventures of Captain Quinton* (New York: The Christian Herald, 1912), pp. 484–485.

which his wife had planted in his absence. He would pour the boiling water all over his wife's garden, and within a day or two, all the plants in it would be dead. Then he would tear all the dead plants out and plant his own garden in the soil instead. Nana ended this story by saying, "Until the day she died, mother never knew why all her plants would die as soon as father came home." (I'm not so sure she didn't know; she may just have been too disgusted with him to pick a fight about it.)

Eventually, when her husband was about 80 years old and beginning to show the effects of old age and his self-centered life, my great-grandmother summoned her two sons and told them to get the old man out of her home. "He just wants to sleep with me all the time, and I won't have it anymore."

My great-grandfather had always been a violent man at home, and often beat his two sons (though Nana said he did not hit the women in his family). So they were happy enough to move him out of their mother's house, whether he liked it or not. They took him to San Francisco and found a place for him in an old men's home there. He lived in that old men's home for about eight years, until he was struck down by an auto as he was crossing a street. He lingered with his injuries for a few days, and died on Christmas Night, 1927, just four days after his 86th birthday and about two months after his 50th wedding anniversary. And that was the end of his long and very *colorful* life.

Here are two photographs of him in his old age. The second was taken in 1906.

Frederick Christian Bender in his old age

Frederick Christian Bender with his wife
and their granddaughter, my aunt Thelma,
on the same porch as in the "Four Generations" photograph

All five of their children married and had children of their own, but by the time I got to talking with Nana about our family's history in the middle 1960s, all four of her siblings were dead (three of them had been dead for decades), and she fallen out of touch with their families. Her two brothers, Richard and Frederick [Jr.], had died in 1930 and 1944, respectively, and her younger sister, Alma, had died as early as 1915, when she was not quite 26 years old. Her older sister, Ardella (Dolly), died only in 1956, so her life was somewhat more fresh in Nana's memory.

9
Nana and Her Three Children

NANA HAD A LONG LIFE, despite its many hardships. She died in 1970, when she was 82 years old. She had outlived all four of her brothers and sisters (and some of their children), as well as both of her husbands and two of her own three children. Her youngest child (my father) died in the same year as she did, eight months later.

Her oldest child was her daughter, my aunt Thelma, named Frances Thelma at birth. Thelma married Francis R. Walker when she was 23 years old, and they had one child, my cousin Joan. Thelma's husband was a service station attendant when she married him, but he soon found much better work as a traveling salesman, selling irrigation pumps to farmers. In this job he had to spend most of his time on the road. In 1961 the Highway Patrol found him dead of a heart attack in his car by the side of a highway in rural California. Thelma went downhill badly after that, and she was eventually found dead in her house by my mother and Nana in 1966, several days after she had died.

The one thing I remember most strongly about my uncle Franny (as we called him) was that he was able to walk on very tall stilts over rough ground. His stilts were about 6 or 7 feet tall, with foot-rests about 3 feet above the ground.

Nana's middle child was my uncle Marty, named Marshall William at birth. Marty died in 1943, when a Navy airplane he was ferrying from Floyd Bennet Field in New York to a base at Atlanta, Georgia, developed engine trouble and crashed in Guilford, North Carolina. His airplane hit a house, exploding in a fireball, and four of the seven members of that family were burned to death. (Two others escaped the house through windows, and the seventh happened to be out in the yard at the moment of the crash.) Marty himself was found dead on the front lawn with his skull and all his arms and legs broken, and severe injuries to many of his internal organs. Marty had married Violet Sada Thomas in 1930; they had one child, my cousin James.

This was the second time in his life that Marty had been very seriously injured. The first time was in 1930. He was involved in a minor automobile accident, which he and the other driver were settling amicably, when a policeman with a previous history of violently abusing prisoners happened by, and took an instant dislike to Marty. He arrested Marty, took him to the private lockup on the beat he patrolled, beat him very severely with a blackjack, and kicked him twice in the stomach—beat him to the point where Marty feared he was going to be beaten to death.[25] The kicks to his stomach also reopened surgery that he had recently had for a hernia.

[25] In those days every police beat in Oakland had its own private lockup, where the patrolman could take a prisoner for interrogation, or simply hold him there indefinitely, without any record kept or any charges brought.

This was in the days when Nana was working for Mr. Munro as his office manager, and Mr. Munro had a great deal of political clout. Nana drew on some of that clout to get a measure of revenge on the policeman for her son's injuries. The ensuing battle provided good copy for the *Oakland Tribune* for the next seven months, and sporadically for several years afterwards.

In the end, the policeman, a patrolman named Laurence R. Pardee, was convicted of simple assault, a misdemeanor (reduced from felony assault with intent to do grave bodily harm, by a courtroom compromise). He was sentenced to six months in the county jail, and fired from the Oakland police force. Uncle Marty also sued him for $20,000.00. (Whether he won that suit I never heard, nor could I find a mention of its outcome in the *Oakland Tribune.*) Pardee would not let go of the matter, but continued to fight for reinstatement as a patrolman for many years. He was supported in this by a great number of his fellow policemen—a fact that did not surprise Nana, but irked her greatly. She knew well, of course, how corrupt the Oakland Police Force was, and how quick many of its patrolmen were to use extreme violence. But this time one of theirs had harmed *her* boy, and she was never going to let go of that.

Nana's youngest child was my father, James Christian Mathiesen [Jr.] He was only about six months old when his father died and his mother's life suddenly became much harder.[26] James was her baby boy, her last child, and her constant reminder of her lost and deeply loved husband. For years she could not bear to let him grow up and go out into the world. In those days babies of either sex were clothed in dresses, and it was a milestone of sorts when a boy got his first pair of pants. Nana kept my father at home and would not let him go to school; and she would not have him wear pants. This continued until he was almost nine years old! Eventually his older brother, my uncle Marty, talked some sense into their mother, and from then on my father was allowed to go to school and to wear pants.

Here is a photograph of my father when he was eight years old, before he was allowed to wear pants and go to school:

[26] Nana had originally named him Oliver, after her husband's uncle Oliver Mathiesen, the brother who had been lost at sea. After her own husband died, Nana changed my father's name to James Christian. (Nana did not tell me this herself, but she told my mother, who told me.)

James Christian Mathiesen [Jr.], age 8

Nana was always worried about "losing" her children. She told me once, quite proudly, that she had to break their spirits lest they defy her. In my father's case, she did this a few years after he started going to school. He refused to do something she had told him to do. When she went to him to punish him, he picked up a stick to defend himself. Nana said that she was frightened and her heart was in her throat, but she also knew that it was a decisive point in their relationship. So she ignored her fears, advanced on him, took the stick from him, and "gave him the beating of his life."

She was right, it was a decisive moment. My father never dared defy her after that—but he never loved her after that, either. I don't think Nana even stopped to notice whether he still loved her or not.

10
James Christian Mathiesen [Jr.]

MY FATHER TOOK AFTER HIS FATHER: he had a fine instinct for machines and the tools needed to work with them. So he went to college to study engineering. After two years spent at Marin Junior College, he transferred to the University of California at Berkeley, where he earned a Bachelor of Science degree in mechanical engineering in 1934. In 1935 he and his brother both joined the U. S. Naval Reserves to be trained as Naval Aviators. They were commissioned as officers (Lieutenants, junior grade) in the U. S. Navy during their first term of active duty.[27]

Here is a photograph of him in uniform, taken at the same time as the photograph of my mother which appears in her chapter at the end of Part 2. Both photographs were taken about 1938, when they got married.

Lt. (j.g.) James Christian Mathiesen [Jr.] in uniform

[27] My father was a tall man, 6'2" in his prime. Nana told me that his father had been a few inches taller than he was.

Once my father told me about a time during his Naval Air Academy years when he was being trained to use a diving suit. He was in his suit under water in Pensacola Bay, learning how to move around and observe things. He noticed what he thought was a cave in a large mound on the floor of the bay, large enough even for a man to explore, so he went over to explore it. As he approached the mound, to his great surprise, it suddenly closed its "cave": it was not a mound after all, but a gigantic fish, the kind called a grouper, which had been waiting patiently, with its mouth open, for its next meal to check out the "cave." Apparently the grouper thought that a full-grown man in a diving suit would be a little too tough to devour.

On August 19, 1938, while still on active duty, he married Edris Elva Leatherman (my mother) in a simple ceremony at Carmel-by-the-Sea, California. At that time he was stationed at the San Diego Naval Air Station in Coronado, California, where they continued to live for about a year. (He remained on active duty through 1939, and went on inactive duty in 1940. In 1951 he was honorably discharged from the U. S. Navy.)

In September, 1939, toward the end of his term of active duty in the Naval Reserve, my father was assigned by the Navy to work as an engineer on the secret Norden Bombsight project, which was being developed by the firm of Carl L. Norden Inc. in New York City.[28] My parents moved to New York, and lived in various rented apartments and houses, generally for no more than a year in each.

In 1941 my father was promoted to Chief Product Engineer and Production Manager of the Norden Bombsight project, and in 1945 he became Director of the Mechanical Engineering Division for the branch of Norden Laboratories Co. at White Plains, New York.[29] In 1947, after he had started working at White Plains, my parents bought their first house. It was a few miles north of White Plains, in a small town called Pleasantville. We lived there a little over five years. To me it felt like an oasis of stability after moving from one home to another every year or so.

★ ★ ★

During World War II the Norden Bombsight became the stuff of legend. It could, so the legend went, drop a bomb onto a target as small as a pickle barrel from a airplane flying at an altitude of 30,000 feet. The secrets of its design were said to be so valuable that aviators had to take a solemn oath to sacrifice their own lives, if need be, in order to keep even one Bombsight from falling into enemy hands. Now, almost eight decades later, there are no more secrets to the Bombsight: its design is public knowledge, and a number of specimens can also be found in museums, and

[28] During his years with Norden my father was granted a number of patents, some of which remained classified for decades afterwards.

[29] From August 1943 to June 1945 my father's work on the Norden Bombsight took him to the Naval Ordnance Plant in Indianapolis, Indiana, and his family moved there with him.

even in private hands. Once it was declassified, sometime in the 1960s, my father was able to purchase a Norden Bombsight for himself as military surplus. It sat in our garage in Los Altos throughout the 1960s.

The legend of the Norden Bombsight was encouraged, even enhanced in the telling and retelling, by Norden Laboratories as well as by the U. S. Navy. It also played a role in wartime propaganda to keep up the spirits of the U. S. civilian populace. When, finally, the two airplanes that dropped the two atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki employed the Norden Bombsight to release their unprecedented weapons on their targets, the combination of the two "ultimate" weapons—the Bomb and the Bombsight—contributed further to the growth of the legend.

I am not qualified to judge how close to the truth the legend ran. What I do know is that the Norden Bombsight represented a real advance in technology for its time. It broke new ground in the design of sophisticated mechanical analog computers. More significantly, it made new use of gyroscopes to give the Bombsight a stable frame of reference for all its computations. This was one of the major inventions that made our network of GPS satellites possible.[30]

★ ★ ★

My mother was a staunch Californian. She felt very strongly that the thirteen years she spent on the East Coast were years of unwelcome exile. Every summer, once World War II was over, we would return to their home town, Berkeley, for a few weeks' vacation there. We would stay in the house of my mother's grandmother, which was in the northern part of Berkeley, in the neighborhood called Northbrae.

On September 21, 1951, my mother's grandmother died, and my mother decided that thirteen years of exile from California were thirteen years too many. One of Carl L. Norden's top men, Maurits ten Bosch, had recently resigned to set up a similar company on his own account, and he was planning to open a branch of his company in San Francisco. He had been the head of the branch of Norden Laboratories in White Plains, where my father worked. Ten Bosch thought so highly of my father's work there that he recruited him for his new firm, and my parents returned to California for good in December, 1952. I was 10 years old at the time, and my brother was 5. We moved into my mother's grandmother's house in Berkeley. (I will have more stories to tell about this house in the pages about my mother's side of the family.)

However, ten Bosch's California venture did not succeed, and he closed it down in March, 1954. For the next ten years my father worked as a mechanical engineer on a succession of projects at one or another company in the aerospace and defense

[30] My father's last project, while he was at Stanford University (1964–70), involved new ways to use gyroscopes to stabilize geosynchronous satellite orbits.

industry in California, mostly at Lockheed. Most of his work was classified, so we heard nothing about it at home.

In 1960, when I left home for college and a room of my own in a rooming house, my parents sold the family house in Berkeley. They moved to Los Altos, California, to live closer to my father's places of work. Late in 1964 my father was hired by the Department of Aeronautics and Astronautics at Stanford University as a Research Engineer (and also as Head of that Department's manufacturing shop), where he remained for the rest of his working life. He died on December 2, 1970.

★ ★ ★

In the summer of 1960, shortly before I entered college, my father took me aside for a private conversation: he wanted to tell me about something that he was certain I would never hear in any course I might take on American history.

He wanted me to know that in the early years of World War II public sentiment about the war was fairly evenly divided between three alternate courses of action. About one-third of the people he knew wanted the United States to stay out of the war, that is, to remain neutral with respect to the Allied and the Axis Powers. Another third wanted us to enter the War on the side of the Allies (that is, England and its allied nations). And the remaining third felt strongly that our best course would be to enter the war on the side of the Axis, and especially to support Germany in the war.

But then one of the Axis powers, Japan, launched a surprise attack on our Naval base at Pearl Harbor, on O'ahu in the territory of Hawai'i; it happened on December 7, 1941. That attack instantly galvanized public opinion in favor of entering the war, and, specifically, in favor of entering it *against* the Axis—and thus, of necessity, on the side of England and the other Allied Powers.

My father continued his account by telling me that after the war, when the horrors of Nazi rule in Germany became more widely known, the one-third of our population who had favored entering the war on the side of Germany were ashamed of the fact, and hardly anyone would now admit how strong the pro-Axis, more precisely, the pro-German, support had been before Pearl Harbor had tipped the balance. He felt it was important that I should hear the truth from him, even though I might never hear it from anyone else.

My father was very proud of his Danish-American heritage, and I had already heard more than once from him various stories about Danish resistance to German occupation during World War II, about the Danish efforts to rescue Jewish Danes from the Nazis by ferrying them across the waters of the Øresund into neutral Sweden, and about the example of resistance to the Nazis set by King Christian X of Denmark. He was appalled by how very close the United States had come to entering the war on the side of Nazi Germany. He said (rightly, I think) that if we had

finally deployed our massive industrial power to support the Axis, Germany would have won the War in Western Europe; and we, Americans and Europeans alike, would now, even in the 1960s, all be living in a Nazi world with all its horrors. He found that an utterly appalling prospect! He was also very much appalled at the prevailing theories about so-called "races" of humankind and about the alleged physical and mental differences between the "races"; he always said that all this was unscientific hokum.[31]

When I have told my story to people here on the East Coast, their usual response is to challenge it. Indeed, one might try to challenge it by noting that—obviously—my father based his estimate on the people he knew best, on the engineers and military personnel with whom he was in daily contact in his work, who might not be a representative sample of the whole nation. There is some value to this observation.

Yet pro-German sentiment was indeed very, very strong in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s, and anti-British sentiment was still also something that had to be reckoned with.[32] Pro-German sentiment in the United States had grown strong during the 1800s. It was based on Germany's demonstrated excellence in the sciences and engineering, in the scholarly study of history and the humanities, in art and literature, and on its superiority in the arts of practical politics, diplomacy and war. (In those days, Germany's defeat in World War I was regarded as a mere blip, a temporary setback, in the progressive arc of German history.) In view of this, I think that my father's assessment of popular sentiment about the War, prior to Pearl Harbor, is more likely than not to be true—no matter how much it might embarrass or shock us now.

★ ★ ★

My father's one great, life-long passion was the early days of flight and the airplanes from those years. One of his best boyhood friends, James Nissen, who also shared this passion, had become manager of the San Jose Airport. The two of them rescued a number of these old, long forgotten airplanes from decay in various barns and warehouses, stored them at the airport, and slowly labored to restore them to flying condition. My father had also put together a nearly complete collection of all the original publications, whether popular or highly technical, about these early airplanes and their design.

I do not remember the full roster of these airplanes, but among them were a Thomas Morse Scout, a Fokker D7 Biplane, and a Bleriot—the model of airplane that made the first successful flight across the English Channel. By the time my father died, he

[31] Personally, he would have preferred that the United States had stayed out of the war altogether, and left the Allies and the Axis to fight it out between themselves.

[32] Anti-British sentiment had very deep roots in American culture, going back to Colonial times, well before the War of Independence and the War of 1812, in both of which Britain was our hated foe.

and his friend had restored only the Thomas Morse Scout to flying condition. As a 'teen I watched it fly, and was proud of what my father had accomplished.

★ ★ ★

My father was not a happy man, though he put up a very good front for his children.

In his childhood, while Nana was working to support her family through the very hard times of her early widowhood, he and his siblings had been cared for by Nana's mother, Marie Bender. To judge by Nana's own stories, her mother was an angry, resentful, combative, domineering woman, and none of the three children particularly liked her. Marie and her husband seem to have treated their own children badly, even abusively, and Nana felt that she had gotten worse treatment than her sisters. (Yet it was Nana who took her mother into her own house after her father had finally been packed off to the old men's home in San Francisco.)

Like mother, like daughter—at least in some cases and to some degree. I have already told how Nana's own efforts to raise her children, and especially my father (the baby of her family and her surrogate for her own lost husband), had soured the relationship between them. My father had turned to his older brother, my Uncle Marty, for emotional support, and in many respects it was Marty who had actually served as his parent when he needed protection, and who had raised him. And then he lost Marty in an airplane crash in 1943. It was my father who had to escort his brother's mangled remains back to Berkeley for cremation and burial—an unspeakably hard task for him, from which I do not think he ever quite recovered.

My mother and Nana were always very close, and—unfortunately—that was because they were quite like one another in ways that did not conduce to my father's happiness. I will not go into any details here, though I will have a little more to say in the pages on my mother's side of the family. It will be enough to say here that my father rarely had any occasion to feel loved in all the years of his life.

Despite all the abuse of his upbringing, my father had the intelligence, the strength, and the self-knowledge deliberately to avoid raising his own children as he had been raised. I knew him as a very loving, kind and humble parent, who was always there for me. I am certain that he would even willingly have died to save my life, had the occasion ever arisen.

Because of all this, I was not too surprised when he once remarked to me that he always wished he had never been born—or if he had had to be born, he would have much preferred to have been born as a bird, since their lives were much shorter and they spent their days flying.

This may be the best note on which to end my account of all my ancestors on my father's side of the family.

PART 2

STORIES FROM MY

MOTHER'S SIDE

OF THE FAMILY

1
COMING TO THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY

ON MY MOTHER'S SIDE, MY ANCESTORS FIRST CAME TO THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA a year or two before 1880. The first of them to arrive were two of my mother's great-great-grandparents, William and Sarah Ann Acker, who had traveled overland from Joliet, Illinois, sometime in the very late 1870s.

The lives of William and Sarah Ann spanned the continent. William was born in upstate New York, in the very sparsely populated town called Galen, in 1821. Sarah Ann was born in Rutland, Vermont, in 1823. Later their families both ended up, by different routes, in neighboring small towns, Concord and Pulaski, in Jackson County, Michigan.

The Ackers were the very first settlers in Concord. In 1831 John and his oldest unmarried son, James, cut a fine farm out of the virgin forest for their family, which at that time included three other sons and two daughters, none of them married. Soon other families began to settle in and around Concord.

Eventually, in 1844, the extended family of Ethiel and Anna (Fenton) Cushman with some of their children and grandchildren came to Jackson County from Rutland, Vermont, having spent some thirteen years in Wyoming County, New York, on their way. They made their home on the shores of a small lake in Pulaski, just south of Concord; the lake is still known as Cushman Lake. Sarah Ann was one of Ethiel's grandchildren, a daughter of his only son, Joseph. She was not quite 21 years old when she arrived in Concord.

The Ackers were Methodists. The Cushmans had been Congregationalists in Vermont, and were Presbyterians in Michigan.[33] Despite going to different churches, William and Sarah Ann soon met, and in 1845 they got married. They then moved to Augusta, Michigan, where all their children were born in the years 1846–50.

Sometime in the 1850s they moved for a second time, to Parma, which is about five miles from Concord. In Parma William kept a general store.

[33] In 1801 the Congregational and the Presbyterian denominations agreed on a joint plan for sharing missionary work and planting new churches throughout the United States, known as the Plan of Union of 1801. In practice, though not in intention, it secured the six New England states for the Congregationalists, but ceded all the rest of the nation to the Presbyterians. The theology and worship of the two denominations was much the same, but the government of individual churches proceeded on somewhat different lines from one denomination to the other. As far as the laity was concerned, they might as well have been the same denomination.

In 1864 or 1865 they moved for a third time, to Joliet, Illinois, a few dozen miles to the south and west of Chicago.

At the time Joliet was an up-and-coming small city, already far more prosperous than Concord, Augusta or Parma. It was located on the Illinois and Michigan Canal, which had been opened for shipping and travel in 1848. The canal connected Chicago (which lies on the south shore of Lake Michigan) with the Illinois River at Peru, Illinois; that river, in turn, flows into the Mississippi River at St. Louis, Miissouri. The Illinois and Michigan Canal helped make Chicago a major transportation hub in the United States, back in the days before railroads spanned the country.

In Michigan William had been an independent small storekeeper. In Joliet he joined a larger business, a hardware store, as a sales clerk. He may not have prospered there as much as he had hoped, for after about ten years in Joliet, he and Sarah Ann pulled up stakes once again and went to California, to the San Francisco Bay area. Thus they crossed the entire United States, from one coast to the other, in the course of about fifty years.

In California William listed his occupation not as merchant, but as "miner" or "mining." He was already about 60 years old, so he was probably too old for the hard work of a mining camp. Nor did he and his wife spend any length of time in the gold fields. At first they lived in a hotel in San Francisco, and then moved across the Bay to Alameda. It seems more likely that William earned his living on the West Coast from the very profitable business of selling supplies and lending money to the men who worked the gold fields with pick and shovel, sluice and pan, than from actually mining gold himself.

Saran Ann died in 1883, William in 1886. They had had only two children who survived long enough to marry and have children of their own. These were two daughters named Mary Rebecca (called "May") and Ella Marie (called "Nellie"). Both daughters were born in Augusta, Michigan, but spent their marriageable years in Parma and Joliet, where each of them found a husband. Each daughter had only one child of her own who lived to adulthood: May had a son, Nellie a daughter. Like their parents, May and Nellie each went to California in the early 1880s.

I know very little about May's life or that of her son, William Acker Clifford. They were already in California in 1882, for her son first appears in city directories for San Francisco and for Alameda County in that year. He worked as a compositor for various newspapers, including the *Evening Bulletin* in San Francisco and the *Morning Times* in Oakland. Also, May's husband died in California in 1884. After that, it is likely that she lived with or near her son, who was not yet married, in Alameda or Oakland, at least for the next few years. No doubt it was May who arranged for her parents to be buried in a plot with perpetual care in the beautiful Mountain View cemetery in Oakland. She died in 1916 in San Francisco.

I am much better informed about Nellie and her daughter, since they were my mother's great-grandmother and grandmother. (I still have Nellie's scrapbooks, her old family photographs, and other relics of her life.) I will tell her stories in a later section of this part of the book. Here I will only mention that she and her daughter came to the San Francisco Bay area in 1885.

May and Nellie's parents had both come from relatively large families. Each of them had been one of ten siblings. May and Nellie, however, established a different pattern for their own descendants, which seems to have persisted up to now. In their own generation, and in each generation after them, either only one child was born, or if two or more children were born in that generation, only one child ended up having children of his or her own.[34] The line of descent from each sister down to the present day is a very thin line indeed.

From Nellie, this thinness of descent has lasted for six generations so far; the current sixth and youngest generation consists of just one young woman, my granddaughter.

From May, the line of descent is just as thin, but I can trace it only for four generations. My information ends with two descendants and their marriages in the fourth generation. I have not been able to find out whether either of those two marriages yielded any children.

However, before we proceed down the river of time toward Nellie and her descendants, let us move backward for a bit and tell what we can about the forebears of her parents, the Ackers on her father's side, the Cushmans and Allertons on her mother's.

[34] When I was in my early 'teens, my mother's sister, Muriel, and her husband adopted a daughter, Darlene, who was 7 years old at the time. Darlene, however, had no children of her own, so the line of descent from Nellie remains as thin as before.

2
The Acker Family

UNTIL FAIRLY RECENTLY, I KNEW NOTHING MUCH about the ancestors of John Acker, William Acker's father.

John Acker himself had been the subject of several short newspaper notices when he died, simply because he had been the oldest inhabitant of Joliet at the time, and two of his children were still alive and close at hand in the city to supply a few details of his life. These notices had already given me a little information about his life and early history.

Here is the fullest of these notices, which appeared in the *Joliet Republican* on April 18, 1874:

Death of a Centenarian

> We have the painful duty this week of recording the death of one of the oldest citizens, not only of this city, but of the whole country. John Acker was born in Rockland Co., New York, on the 18th day of September, 1774, and consequently lacked but a few months of being a hundred years old. He removed to Wayne county, New York, before the War of 1812, and resided there until 1831, when he again took his way westward and settled at Jackson, Michigan. From there he came to Will county about thirteen years ago, and resided with Mrs. Francis Owen of Frankfort. He has lived with his son, in this city, for the last four years. Mr. Acker had ten children, of which Mrs. Onderdonk was the oldest, and Mr. William Acker the youngest. The funeral took place at the Methodist Church on Monday last, at 2 o'clock p. m.

This notice was reprinted in the *Jackson Daily Citizen* on April 29, 1874, with the following additional paragraph at the end:[35]

> Mr. Acker was the father of the Hon. Henry Acker, now a resident of St. Paul, Minnesota; for several years a prominent citizen of this county; member of the legislature and Speaker of the House of Representatives; also, Peter P. Acker, deceased, and William Acker, now of Joliet, and Elizabeth Acker, wife of Russell Blackman, for many years the owner

[35] Jackson, Michigan, is the county seat for Pulaski, Concord and Parma, and the legislature mentioned here is the Michigan State Legislature.

and proprietor of the American Hotel. These members of the Acker family will be well remembered by all our older inhabitants.

A little further digging in Michigan and Illinois records revealed that Mrs. Onderdonck was Charity Acker before her marriage, and also that Mrs. Francis Owen was Elizabeth Acker, and then Elizabeth Blackman, before her first and her second marriages. That accounts for five of John Acker's ten children. A sixth child was his son, James, who came to Concord in 1831 to prepare the way for his father and siblings, married Russell's sister, Lucy Blackman, in 1833, and died of a fever in 1835. An obituary of Charity (Acker) Onderdonck published in 1881 adds one more sibling to the list, Jacob Acker, who was then living in Iowa.

Some of John Acker's other three children might also have come to Michigan. There are other men in Michigan who are named Acker and are of approximately the right age, but nothing has been found so far that connects any of them with John Acker or his seven known children.

Then in 1991 Ethel Kay Konight published her genealogy of an old Dutch family named Eckerson or Ackerson, who were living in New Amsterdam (New York now) and in its outlying settlements in Rockland County, New York.[36] In her pages I found my ancestor, John Acker, listed under a Dutch form of his name, Johannes Eckerson or Ackerson (born September 16, 1774), with his wife, named Nancy Palmer, and their first four children, corresponding almost perfectly in their names and dates of birth with all the other evidence available up to then: Geertruy (b. June 6, 1802), Hennary (b. June 8, 1804), Maria (b. September 1, 1806), and Elisabeth (b. June 10, 1808).[37] After 1808 John Acker's family does not seem to appear anywhere in the records of Rockland County.

This is in almost perfect agreement with the statement in his obituary that John Acker was born in Rockland County, but moved to Wayne County before the War of 1812. He and his family are indeed listed there in the U. S. Census returns for 1820 and 1830, in the thinly settled community of Galen.[38] The early town records of Galen were lost to fire in 1862, so there are no contemporary data now available for the

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[36] Ethel Kay Konight, *The Ackerson-Eckerson Family in America* (1991 and later revised editions). [See p. 107.]

[37] In English, these four children's names are Charity (the usual English rendering of Geertruy, the Dutch form of the name for Gertrude, to keep the pronunciation roughly the same), Henry, Mary and Elizabeth.

[38] The history of counties in New York state is complex. Wayne County was formed in 1823; until then Galen was in Seneca County. (John Acker's family cannot be found anywhere in New York in the U. S. Census return for 1810. They may still have been on the road to Galen on census day in that year, and thus would not have been counted.)

births of John and Nancy's next six children, or for any marriages and deaths in the family while they were living there.

In 1825 the Erie Canal was opened for business and travel, and population surged all along the Canal's route. The Canal passed through Galen. That surge was probably what prompted John Acker to pull up stakes a second time, even though he was 57 years old, and move to the wilds of southern Michigan. I suspect that he had come to like living in a small isolated community, with few if any neighbors.

It was in 1831 that John Acker and his family left Galen for Concord, Michigan, as already noted, and we can track them more readily from then onward.[39]

As to John Acker's remoter ancestry, Konight establishes only that he is a descendant in the sixth generation from Thomas Hugesson and Sara Brout of New Amsterdam (now New York) through one of the quadruplets she bore in 1644, two girls and two boys.

The quadruplet in question, one of the two to survive and leave descendants, was named Jan Tomaszen (that is, son of Thomas). It was his son Cornelis Eckerson who continued our line of descent in the third generation, which is the generation where the surname Eckerson or Ackerson first appears in the records. That line of descent continues through Thomas Eckerson in the fourth generation and Jan Eckerson in the fifth, down to Johannes Eckerson, who is also my John Acker, in the sixth generation.

The first two generations appear to have lived in New Amsterdam, on the island of Manhattan. In the third generation, Cornelis moved across the Hudson River with a number of other Dutch families, from Manhattan to Rockland County. Subsequent generations continued to live in Rockland County, in the towns of Tappan and Clarkstown, until Johannes Eckerson left the Dutch community there to spend the rest of his life among English speakers as John Acker.[40]

It seems to me likely that John's wife, Nancy Palmer, had some influence on their decision to leave Rockland County's Dutch community, since her name shows that her family was not Dutch in ancestry or in culture.

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[39] John Acker's oldest daughter, Charity, and his oldest son, Henry, had already married at Galen, to John Onderdonk and Amanda Pope respectively. They and their families came to Michigan some years later than their father and their five siblings. Mary probably also married at Galen, but her husband's name has been forgotten, and it is not clear whether she ever left Galen. Elizabeth was still unmarried when she came to Concord with her family; she married Russell Blackman in Concord in 1839, when she was about 30 years old. James, Jacob and William also married after their family came to Michigan; there is no record of Peter's ever marrying.

[40] Konight, pp. 1, 2–3, 7, 25, 59–60 and 107.

And that is all I have been able to learn so far about John Acker's ancestors. Konight was chiefly interested in documenting lines of descent—births, marriages and deaths—not in fleshing out these bare bones of family history with more information about the lives and times of the people whom she recorded.

About John Acker's other children, however, there is one more story that points toward California. One of William Acker's brothers, Peter P. Acker, went west in the Spring of 1849, during the first year of the great California Gold Rush, as part of a well-organized company of prospectors from Fayette, Hillsdale County. They called themselves the "Fayette Rovers." They started out in late March; by July 4 they had reached Wyoming, near Fort Laramie. There they celebrated Independence Day with lots of exuberant, noisy gunfire—in the course of which Peter's gun fired prematurely and shot his thumb off![41]

And that is the last I have to tell about Peter P. Acker. I have not learned whether he died on the trail from his injury, or whether he recovered enough to reach California with the other "Fayette Rovers." Either way, Peter does not seem ever to have returned to Michigan; his family thought him dead by the time of his father's death in 1874.

[41] William Lorton mentions Peter's accident in his manuscript diaries of the journey, which are now preserved in the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley. They have not yet been published, but Peter's accident is cited by at least one scholar who has read them: Will Bagley, *With Golden Visions Bright Before Them: Trails to the Mining West, 1849–1852* (2012), p. 126.

3
Isaac Allerton and His Family

SARAH ANN CUSHMAN'S ANCESTORS IN NORTH AMERICA can be traced even further back than her husband's, back as far as 1620 and 1621, when they crossed the Atlantic to found Plymouth Colony. They were Isaac Allerton (with his family) and his brother-in-law, Degory Priest (alone) in 1620 on the *Mayflower,* and Robert Cushman (with his son Thomas) in 1621 on the *Fortune.*

Isaac Allerton is perhaps the most interesting, complex and compelling figure among all of the early settlers at Plymouth. Until fairly recently, however, nothing was known about his own ancestry, and relatively little about his activity in North America outside of Plymouth Colony.[42]

Though Isaac and his family had been members of John Robinson's Separatist church back in Leiden—the group of people who founded Plymouth Colony—he does not appear to have gotten along very well with his fellow Separatists in Plymouth, much less with the Puritans in Massachusetts Bay Colony just to the north. This led him to leave Plymouth around 1631 and set up a new center for his commercial operations at Marblehead, which was still only a part of Salem at that time. (Salem was first settled in 1626; Massachusetts Bay Colony was founded only in 1630.) In its early years, the inhabitants of Salem had been more inclined to Separatism than to Puritanism, and the town maintained close ties with Plymouth Colony well into the late 1600s. In 1635, however, Massachusetts Bay expelled Isaac, for reasons that are not explained in the extant records. He handed over his properties to his son-in-law, Moses Maverick, who had already been assisting him there.

Isaac seems not to have been overly inconvenienced by any of this. He merely moved his commercial operations to the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam and to the English colony of New Haven, and continued to trade as before.[43]

One major issue in the conflict between Isaac and the two colonies clearly touched on religion, and it centered on two outsiders who were opposed in principle to the Puritan and Separatist religious programs of Massachusetts Bay and of Plymouth. One of these men was Thomas Morton—he of the famous Maypole at Merrymount. The other was Roger Williams, who would later be revered as the founder of the city of Providence and the Colony of Rhode Island.

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[42] His ancestry was finally established only recently, after more than a century and a half of effort by genealogists. He was born in East Bergholt, Suffolk County, England, and his family was part of a small Separatist community there.

[43] New Haven was a separate, independent colony in those days; it did not become a part of Connecticut Colony until 1664, some years after Isaac Allerton's death.

In most respects Morton and Williams could not have been more different. Morton was a frank and open anti-Puritan and a Royalist, wholly secular in his outlook. He was also a lawyer who had influence with the wealthy and powerful back in England. What was even worse in the eyes of the two colonies, he seems to have taken the side of the indigenous native population in the impending conflict between them and the ever-increasing number of European settlers over land use and land ownership. Indeed, he made an effort to provide the natives not just with European firearms, but with technology needed to make, use and maintain them—possibly even as a matter of principle, not just for profit.

Williams, in contrast to Morton, was an ordained minister with Separatist inclinations. His theology was continually evolving, and it became ever more eccentric as it evolved. He came quite early to two radical conclusions. First, he taught that no civil magistrate, no government—and certainly not the government of either colony in New England!—had the right to impose any norms of religious belief and practice on anyone in the community under its rule. And second, he also taught that settlers from Europe had no right to take or use any land in New England unless they had fairly and lawfully purchased it from its Native owners. Each of these teachings was an axe laid at the root of both Colonies' programs of government and expansion.

Yet Isaac seems to have supported each of these two men, though his support for Williams has largely to be inferred from dates and circumstances.

After Morton had been expelled from Plymouth in 1628, and had made his way back to England safely, it was Isaac who deliberately brought him back to New England in 1629, thinking that he could be useful there in business. And when Morton returned a third time, around 1640, he started working for the colonial interests of the anti-Puritan Royalist, Sir Fernando Gorges, in what is now York County, Maine, at a time when Isaac, too, was working very closely with Gorges.

And it was Isaac, too, who may have been one of Williams' stronger supporters while he served as Pastor to the Church at Salem, and whose support may have helped Williams be elected as Assistant Pastor to the Church at Plymouth after he had been compelled to leave Salem. As a resident of Marblehead, Isaac's designated church was the one at Salem; yet he formally joined that church only after Williams had become Pastor there. Indeed, his support of Williams may have been why Isaac was expelled from Massachusetts Bay, where the magistrates had objected strongly to Williams' theological views almost from the very moment when he arrived in New England.[44]

Isaac was married three times. His first wife, Mary, died during the hard first winter at Plymouth in 1620/21, though three of their children survived: Bartholomew, Mary

[44] The entry about his expulsion in the Massachusetts Bay Colony's records is terse and somewhat cryptically worded, but this is usually how it is explained.

and Remember. (Bartholomew went back to England when he was a little older, and spent the rest of his life there.) Around 1626 Isaac took a new wife, Fear Brewster, by whom he had a son, Isaac [Jr.].[45] Fear died around 1644. Ten years later he married Joanna Swinerton in New Haven; they had no children. Isaac himself died in early 1659; Joanna outlived him by at least 25 years.

Of Joanna a story was told (by her step-granddaughter, who was living with her at the time) which sheds some light on her character and values, and may do the same for her late husband's.

After the restoration of the monarchy in England in 1660, the new king, Charles II, issued a general amnesty, which specifically excluded the men who had put his father, the previous king, Charles I, on trial and had him beheaded. These men were regicides, "king-killers," and they were to be seized and brought to justice. Three of the regicides soon escaped to New England, where they were sheltered by Puritan sympathizers with the connivance of the local magistrates. This was a very risky thing for anyone to do: it was high treason to shelter any regicide, and in those days the punishment for high treason was a horrifying death: men were to be drawn, hanged and quartered alive; women were to be burned alive. Even so, it was Isaac's widow, Joanna, who took that risk in New Haven by offering two of the regicides—William Goffe and Edward Whaley—shelter and safety in her own house in New Haven in 1661.[46]

Isaac's two daughters remained in New England with their father, where each of them eventually married. His younger daughter, Remember, married a business associate of her father's, Moses Maverick, at Marblehead. His older daughter, Mary, became the wife of Thomas Cushman in Plymouth, who was the only living child of Plymouth Colony's business agent in England, Robert Cushman.

And that brings us to Robert Cushman and his family, and to Sarah Ann Cushman's ancestors.

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[45] Fear was a daughter of William Brewster, the Teacher of the Church at Plymouth. Isaac [Jr.] spent most of his adult life in Virginia, where his daughters eventually married into some of the wealthiest and best-connected families of that colony.

[46] The story first appears in Ezra Stiles, *A History of Three of the Judges of King Charles I* (1794), pp. 63–65. Stiles had been told it by an elderly widow, Mrs. James Sherman, who in her youth had been a friend of Isaac Allerton's granddaughter, Elizabeth (Allerton) Eyres. This granddaughter had been living with her widowed step-grandmother, Joanna, in 1661, when she hid the two regicides in her house.

4
Robert Cushman

THE CUSHMANS HAVE BEEN TELLING AND RETELLING STORIES about their ancestors, printing these stories and all the supporting documents they can find, and passing them on to their descendants for nearly two centuries now. So there is much to tell in this part of my book.

The Cushman story begins with the founding of the first European colony in New England, Plymouth Colony on the shores of Cape Cod Bay, in 1620 and the years following. Two ships brought the first colonists there, the *Mayflower* in 1620 and the *Fortune* in 1621. Robert Cushman, the first of that name in North America, had meant to come on the *Mayflower,* but adverse circumstances had delayed his journey for a year and he came on the *Fortune* instead. With Robert came his only living child, Thomas, 14 years old.

Robert was the Colony's business agent in England, and he returned there on the *Fortune* for further negotiations about the Colony's complex financial affairs. He had hoped to settle permanently in the Colony after his work in England was done. Thomas stayed behind, living in the household of the Colony's Governor, William Bradford, until his father should return on some later ship.

As it happened, these negotiations dragged on indefinitely, leaving every party more and more dissatisfied with all the others and ever more grumpy. Robert was already suffering from what seems (in retrospect) to have been a weak heart, and the stresses of these long negotiations no doubt aggravated his condition. He died, still in England, in May, 1625, leaving Thomas orphaned in Plymouth, although by then he was already a young man of 18 years.

The Cushmans, like the other leading families of Plymouth Colony, were members of the English Separatist Protestant Church in Leiden, led by John Robinson as Pastor and William Brewster as Teacher.[47] During one of the most difficult points in the financial negotiations for the colony, Robinson wrote to John Carver, the prospective Governor of the colony, in 1620, saying that Robert Cushman was

[47] These were two distinct church offices in the government of this church, as they were in many Protestant churches of that time.

> known (though a good man and of special abilities in his kind, yet) most unfit to deal for other men, by reason of his singularity, and too great indifferancy for any conditions.[48]

Despite the grumpy tone of his letter, Robinson seems to me to have correctly assessed Robert Cushman's character. I take the words "his singularity, and too great indifferancy for any conditions" to mean that Robert was eccentric and went his own way, and also that he didn't care what other people might think of his words and deeds. Indeed, these two facets of his character are plain to see in all that he wrote and almost all that he did.

Robert had been born in 1578 in Kent County, England, in a tiny village, Rolvenden, almost lost among the hills and forests of the High Weald of Kent. In 1597, when he was about 19 years old, he came down out of the High Weald to Canterbury, the busiest and largest city in all Kent County. There he apprenticed himself to a grocer.

Those were the last years of Queen Elizabeth I's reign. England had a Protestant state church, the Church of England, with the Queen as its head and the Archbishop of Canterbury as its foremost prelate. But it was an age of religious controversies among Protestants, often interwoven with political controversies that challenged the Crown itself, or at least the Crown's right to govern the established Church. Robert took extreme positions in these controversies, and maintained them publicly by posting some writings of his own (termed "libels" in the records of his case) on the church doors in 1603. He was imprisoned and excommunicated for these "libels" and also for his refusal to submit to authority. In 1606, wishing to marry, he did finally make his submission, so that he would be allowed to take communion and to marry.

But this submission of his was only *pro forma.* He would not refrain from theological controversies. Within half a year he was caught up into another court proceeding, against an outspoken theological controversialist named Gilbert Gore—and this proceeding seemed likely to prove more dangerous than the earlier one for him and his new family. Robert's son Thomas was born early in 1608, only a few months after Gilbert Gore was finally sentenced to prison. Shortly thereafter Robert took his wife and new-born son and left England for the Netherlands, where they hoped to find a refuge.

And that was how Robert ended up in Leiden. He joined John Robinson's Separatist Church there in 1609, and soon he became the Church's business agent as it tried to found a colony in North America as a refuge from prosecution. This business took him back to England, probably more than once.

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[48] William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation* [manuscript, very often published], book I, chapter 6. (Here and in other quotations I have modernized the spelling, but not the vocabulary or the sentence structure.)

While in England, in 1619 Robert once again jumped into theological controversy, writing a long pamphlet with the title, *The Cry of a Stone.* It circulated in manuscript, and was finally also printed in 1642, long after its author's death. Its very long full title summarizes the arguments he advanced in it against the established Church of England and its governance, but equally against the Puritans and their alternate plan for a *purified* version of the established Church:

> THE CRY OF A STONE, OR, A TREATISE SHEWING WHAT IS THE RIGHT *Matter, Form,* and *Government* of the visible CHURCH of CHRIST, how, and wherein the present Church of *England* is wanting and defective, both in the body of the Land, and in the *Parochial* branches thereof, with divers Reasons and Grounds taken from the Scriptures, to persuade all that fear GOD, rather to suffer any afflictions at the hands of men, than to submit to man's carnal policy and human devices in the worship of God, or be deprived of the sweet fellowship of the Saints in the right order of the *Gospel,* together with a just reproof of the over-strained and excessive separation, contentions and divisions of such as commonly are called *Brownists.*

It is a well-written, well-organized pamphlet, especially coming from a writer who in its preface says that he had had no formal schooling at all either in English or in Latin. Its style is plain and easy to understand. In his preface, the author explains why he wrote it in that style:

> I find that things are easiest understood when they are set down shortly and when there is no interlacings or surplusage of words, more that barely to express the thing intended. I have endeavored for a plain and familiar style.

In 1622, newly returned from Plymouth Colony, Robert arranged to have another pamphlet of his, *A Sermon Preached at Plymouth in New England,* printed, but he published it anonymously. In his preface he explains why he chose anonymity:

> I have not set down my name, partly because I seek no name, and principally, because I would have nothing esteemed by names, for I see a number of evils to arise through names, when the persons are either famous or infamous, and God and man is often injured.

The basic premise in all his writing is that one ought to seek the Truth above all else, and to the best of one's understanding, follow it wherever it leads. One ought to take no heed at all of other men's contrary opinions and judgements, but always be ready to risk everything—life, liberty, goods—for the sake of Truth. Nor ought one

to try to build a reputation for oneself. Rather, let one's work stand or fall on its own merits.[49]

[49] Also in 1622 Robert arranged for the publication of a second short work, *A Relation or Journal of the Beginning and Proceedings of the English Plantation Settled at Plimoth in New England,* to which he contributed a brief dedication to John Peirce, one of the Colony's staunchest backers in England, and a short essay to justify the lawfulness of English efforts to colonize parts of North America. Each of these was signed only by his initials, not his full name. Both the *Sermon* and the *Relation and Proceedings* were printed for the same London bookseller, John Bellamie.

5
Thomas Cushman and His Family in Plymouth Colony

ROBERT'S SON THOMAS had remained behind when his father returned to England in 1622. He lived in the household of the Colony's Governor, William Bradford, where he no doubt spent time reading in Bradford's fine library. Like his father, Thomas seems to have been interested in theology and church governance; unlike his father, he appears to have been less independent-minded in his views. Upon the death of William Brewster the church office of Teacher fell vacant, and in 1649 Thomas was chosen to be his successor, the next Teacher in Plymouth Colony. He was 41 years old then. He was already a married man with four children, and he would have four more during his years as Teacher: four boys and four girls in all. He remained in the office of Teacher until his death in 1691.

1691 was also the year in which Plymouth Colony ceased to exist in its own right, as a distinct jurisdiction in New England. Diplomatic efforts in England on the part of its neighbor to the north, Massachusetts Bay Colony, together with its own Governor's indifference, resulted in the official dissolution of Plymouth and the annexation of all its territory by Massachusetts Bay.

Thomas's wife, as already noted, was Mary Allerton. She had been one of the youngest children who came to Plymouth on board the Mayflower. To judge by the estimated birth of their first known child, Thomas and Mary married sometime in 1636, when Mary was about 20 years old. Mary had a long life. By the time of her death, toward the end of 1699, she was the last survivor of all those who had crossed the Atlantic on the *Mayflower* in 1620. She was buried next to her husband on Burial Hill in Plymouth, without any gravestones to mark their graves.[50]

We do not have much in the way of stories to tell about either Thomas or his wife Mary. No manuscripts survive of any of Thomas's sermons, or indeed of any writings by him. Like his father, he may not have wished to be "esteemed by names."

Thomas and Mary had four sons, the youngest of whom was named Eleazar. Eleazar married Elizabeth Coombs, a great-granddaughter of Degory Priest, who was Isaac Allerton's brother-in-law and had come to Plymouth with Isaac on the *Mayflower.*[51] Eleazar and Elizabeth had at least seven children, and probably more. Their eldest

[50] In 1715 the Plymouth Church had a headstone and footstone carved of blue slate to mark Thomas's grave. The present memorial obelisk at the grave was put up in 1858 by a large committee of his descendants.

[51] Therefore Eleazar and Elizabeth were second cousins once removed. Degory died at Plymouth during the first hard winter there, in 1620/21. His wife took a new husband; they and all her children came to Plymouth in 1623.

son was named John, and he was born in 1690. He married Joanna Pratt in 1715. John and Joanna had at least three sons, one of whom was named Charles.

Thomas, Eleazar, John and Charles were the second, third, fourth and fifth generations from Robert in our line of descent.

During the 1600s the population of Plymouth Colony had grown large enough that the old settlement could not contain it all, and additional towns were founded on its territory, including the town of Plympton. Eleazar and his family eventually moved from Plymouth to Plympton, where his brother Isaac was the Pastor of the church. They may have ended their days in that town, and may have been buried in its oldest cemetery, but no records survive of their deaths, and no gravestones mark their graves anywhere. Nor do any stones mark the graves of John and Joanna, who were almost certainly buried in the Plympton cemetery.

John and Joanna had become landless, and then very poor, possibly due to long-lasting ill health or other misfortunes; they ended their days supported by the town of Plympton. Their children, including our ancestor Charles, left Plympton to make lives for themselves elsewhere.

6
Charles Cushman and His Family in Connecticut and Vermont

CHARLES CUSHMAN, IN THE FIFTH GENERATION FROM ROBERT, left Plympton and traveled from one town to another in southern Massachusetts. In 1739 he happened to be in Bridgewater, where he met and married a servant girl named Mary Harvey. Their first three children were all born in different towns in southern Massachusetts: Mary in Norton in 1740, Bethia in Sutton in 1742, and Isaac in Uxbridge in 1744. Soon, however, he and his family moved to Connecticut and settled in Norwich, a town some ways up the Thames River from New London. Their fourth child, Charles [Jr.], was born there in 1747.[52] In Norwich he supported his family by ironwork and kept a forge. Charles and Mary had six more children in Norwich, the last of whom was their third son, Frederick, born in 1758.

The first Cushman genealogy, published in 1855, records a story about Charles' wife, Mary Harvey:

> [She] was an English woman by the name of Mary Harvey, whose history is a romance. Her father was an Episcopal clergyman of London, with a large fortune and title blood, but a *younger* son. Her mother died when she was young and her step mother treated her ill—as step mothers often do. Her father resolved upon separating them, and entrusted her, with all her mother's valuables and a sum of money to be invested for her education, to the care of a gentleman, who engaged to place her with some friends in Scotland. The gentleman proved a scoundrel, took possession of all her effects and landed her and left her at service in America, utterly destitute. A young girl, alone and unfriended, her story found sympathizers, but none to undertake to right her wrongs. Her father, getting no tidings of her, died, as she learned, of grief; while she married Charles Cushman, the 'Forgeman,' as the title runs in some of the old papers of the day. Her husband and herself formed many plans, wrote many letters, and made many resolves, all having in view the recovery of her property. Several years since, her grandson, John Cushman (who lived at Ellisburg, N. Y.) was fitted out for England, with that aim; but waiting in New York city for a

[52] There were already several regular coach-roads between Norwich and the towns around Uxbridge. (Early almanacs for New England commonly include descriptions of the best stagecoach routes, with names of the inns in the towns along the way; one can trace the old coach-roads from town to town by means of these lists. I have examined the lists published in *Mein and Fleeming's Massachusetts Register, with an Almanack for the year MDCCLXVII* (Boston, 1766), pp. 16–26.)

> ship, he took a fever, and after long suffering, returned home. Nothing was ever obtained of her property from England.[53]

The author of that genealogy almost certainly got this story directly from Mary's youngest son, Frederick, with whom he had kept up a correspondence while working on his Cushman genealogy. Whatever the facts of the matter may be, it seems clear that Mary's husband and family believed her story to be true, since they made such an effort to recover her property.[54]

Sometime in the 1760s Charles and most of his family left Norwich and headed for what is now southern Vermont, where land had newly been opened for settlement.[55] They went by way of Milford (in Massachusetts) to Bennington, which had been settled only in 1761.

Then, sometime in the 1770s Charles and his family moved further northward, to Rutland, where he and his son Isaac bought land and started to farm it jointly. Isaac had married by then, and had had children of his own; so the farm was home to three generations of the same family all at once.[56] Charles [Sr.] died in 1791, and is buried at Rutland, but again no gravestone marks his grave. His wife Mary died in 1810 in Georgia, Vermont, at the home of her son Frederick, with whom she lived in her old age. She, too, has no gravestone to mark her grave.

Charles' son Isaac Cushman was the sixth generation from Robert in our line of descent. He married a woman named Lois sometime in the late 1760s, when he was in his early twenties.

There seems to have been some old family mystery around Lois, more than simply where and when she and Isaac met and married—though those things, too, remain unknown. Her only son, Ethiel, preserved the maiden surnames of each of his and his wife's female ancestors as middle names of the daughters named after that ancestor; but the daughter named after Lois had no middle name, not even in the

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[53] Henry Wyles Cushman, *A Historical and Biographical Genealogy of the Cushmans* (1855), p. 140.

[54] For whatever it may be worth, no record of Mary Harvey's birth has been found in the extant records of any town in New England, whether from Bridgewater or elsewhere.

[55] In those days that territory was still disputed land, claimed by New York and by New Hampshire. With the aid of Ethan Allan and his "Green Mountain Boys," the settlers of this region rejected the claims of New York and New Hampshire alike, and formed an independent republic, which they soon named the Republic of Vermont. Only in 1791 did the independent Republic of Vermont join the United States, though most its settlers had already been fighting on the side of the United States during the War of Independence.

[56] Their middle son, Charles [Jr.], had married while his parents were still in Connecticut. He and his family came to Vermont in the 1770s, but they settled in Bennington, not Rutland. Their youngest son, Frederick, was still in his early 'teens when his family moved to Rutland, and came there with them.

record of his own children that Ethiel kept in his family Bible. The most likely explanation of this silence is that his mother herself came to her marriage without any surname of her own, or at least any surname that she was willing to use and have remembered.[57] (Lois was probably still alive and living in the household of one of her children at the time when her namesake granddaughter was born, so the fact that this granddaughter was not given a middle name may reflect Lois's own wishes in the matter.[58])

Isaac served in the Vermont militia during the War of Independence from 1778 onward, under the command of Colonel Seth Warner; he held the rank of Lieutenant. Among other matters, his unit marched to Fort Ticonderoga in 1780, and later that year to Fort Vengeance. (Both forts were under Vermont's control at that time.) He died while in the army in 1783, just days after he had signed his Last Will. He had passed his 39th birthday just two days before he died. His place of burial remains unknown, as does his wife's.

Isaac had four daughters, but only one son, whom he named Ethiel. Though Ethiel is a very uncommon name indeed, there were several other men who had been given that name in Vermont about the same time. The easiest explanation of his son's name is that it was also the name of someone Isaac knew and liked, but it is hard to tell at so great a remove just who that person might have been.[59]

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[57] Not quite everyone had a legal surname in those days. It could have been that Lois was a foundling baby, raised in a family that did not adopt her and also treated her badly enough that she hated their very name. Alternatively, Lois might just possibly have been a Native American, among whom surnames were not always used, or an African American, whose surnames were very often those of some hated owner of slave ancestors.

[58] I should also mention that there is only a single contemporary written record that so much as identifies Isaac's wife and children by first name, and that is his Last Will, written just before his death in 1786. Almost the only other good source of information about them was one of Isaac's elderly great-grandsons, Charles Walker Cushman (1831–1907), who grew up in Ethiel Cushman's household. The genealogist Henry Wright Cushman corresponded with him in the 1890s and 1900s, and incorporated his information into his *Genealogy of Ethiel Cushman* (1944).

[59] The name Ethiel sounds Biblical, but it is not found anywhere in the Authorized Version of the English Bible. The closest name there is Ithiel, found in Nehemiah 11:7 and Proverbs 30:1. Some other English versions of the Bible have Ethiel in these places.

7
Ethiel Cushman and His Family in Vermont and Michigan

ETHIEL CUSHMAN WAS THE SEVENTH GENERATION from Robert Cushman in our line of descent. He was born in Vermont in 1771. He married Anna Fenton in 1791. She was of Scots-Irish ancestry, and her family was part of a Scots-Irish Presbyterian community that had settled in Rutland.

Ethiel and Anna had ten children. The younger five of their children died in Rutland as various waves of disease swept through the town in 1803, 1813, 1818 and 1819. Farming had always been hard in Vermont; the winters were long and cold, and the soil rocky. In 1816 farming suddenly became much, much harder. That was the legendary "year without a summer," when even in July and August the ground would freeze hard for days on end, killing all the crops. People named that year "Eighteen-Hundred-and-Froze-to-Death."[60]

Just five of Ethiel and Anna's ten children were left alive after 1819, two sons and three daughters. All three daughters had married in Rutland (in 1813, 1817 and 1821); and all three of them would soon leave Rutland with their new families, hoping to make new homes for themselves somewhere better suited to farming. All three of them settled in Wyoming County, in western New York, during the years after 1817, as did Ethiel's older son, Isaac (who never married).

Ethiel and Anna, Ethiel's other son Joseph and his wife, Rebecca (Green) Cushman, and their children hung on to their farm in Vermont until 1831, when they finally threw in the proverbial towel and joined the rest of their family in Wyoming County, New York. However, the lure of new land, even better suited to farming, continued to call. In 1844 Ethiel and his entire family moved again, to Michigan, where they bought a farm on a small lake in the town of Pulaski, just to the south of the town of Concord.

The Cushman grandparents and parents spent the rest of their days on that farm. Ethiel and Anna (Fenton) Cushman and their son Joseph Fenton Cushman are all buried in Maple Grove Cemetery in Concord, just inside the cemetery entrance. Rebecca (Green) Cushman is buried in Arlington, Michigan, where she died. She had gone there to help out the family of her son, Joseph Butler Cushman, who had died just eight days after the birth of his last child, leaving his widow with three

[60] We now know that the "year without a summer" resulted from the eruption of Mount Tambora in Indonesia, the deadliest volcanic eruption in recorded history. (Some 10,000 people died immediately, and about 60,000 more from ensuing famine and disease.)

small children to raise and hardly any kin of her own close at hand.[61] Rebecca is buried in Hoppin Cemetery, just across the town line into Bangor. All four of their graves are marked with gravestones; these are the first gravestones any of our own Cushman ancestors ever put on their family graves. (Gravestones are not at all rare in other lines of descent from Robert and Thomas Cushman; it seems to have been a peculiarity just in our line of descent not to have used them for so many generations.)

Joseph Fenton and Rebecca (Green) Cushman had ten children of their own. Three of them died young; the other seven—four boys and three girls—married and had children of their own. Three of the four sons married, had children and stayed in the Midwest for the rest of their lives, as did one of the three daughters. The fourth son's life is much harder to trace, but most of it seems to have been spent in New England, far away from all his relatives.

The other two daughters both ended up in California. The younger of them was Martha E. Cushman, who married Festus Cone Lewis in Michigan and had one child; she and her family left for San Francisco about the same time as her sister did with her family, but by a different route, spending some years in New York State first.

The older of those two daughters was my great-great-great-grandmother, Sarah Ann (Cushman) Acker, with whose story I began this part of the book. As already noted, her two daughters were Mary Rebecca Acker, called "May," and my great-great-grandmother, Ella Maria Acker, called "Nellie."

[61] His widow, Lucinda Adelia (Cross) Cushman, did have a sister living in Arlington, but she had her hands quite full at the time with four small children of her own. The two sisters seem to have had no other kin anywhere in Michigan.

8
Ella Maria "Nellie" (Acker) Osgood

AS ALREADY NOTED, NELLIE ACKER WAS BORN in Augusta, Michigan, in 1850. During the first fifteen years of her life, her parents moved twice, first to Parma, Michigan by 1860, and then by 1865 to Joliet, Illinois.

Joliet had been founded only about thirty years earlier, but it had little more than hints of its frontier days when the Ackers arrived. It was there in 1869, about two months before her 19th birthday, that Nellie married Augustus Algernon Osgood, who was about 11 years her senior.

Here are photographs of Nellie's mother, Nellie herself, and Nellie's only child, Alice, all taken on the same day in the same studio in Joliet in 1873:

Sarah Ann (Cushman) Acker

Nellie (Acker) Osgood

Alice May Osgood

Augustus had been born in Joliet in 1839, the eldest son of one of the city's wealthiest and most respected citizens, Uri Osgood. (We shall have more to tell about Uri in the next section.) Augustus was educated at Joliet as a boy. In 1857, when he was about 16 years old, he was sent to New Haven for two years of advanced education at

William H. Russell's Military Institute.[62] He returned to Joliet late in 1859, not long before Civil War broke out in the United States.

On August 30, 1862, Augustus enlisted in the 100th Illinois Infantry Regiment, Company B. Probably by virtue of his military training in New Haven, he was made the First Lieutenant of his Company, that is, he was the second in command under the Captain of his Company. The 100th Regiment marched to the South, where it soon took part in the Second Battle of Murfreesboro (also known as the Battle of Stone's River), one of the bloodiest battles in all the Civil War. There he was wounded; in consequence he resigned his commission on February 16, 1863, and returned to Joliet to recuperate for a few weeks. Then he returned to the army, where he served in the Quartermaster's Department until the end of the War, first in Tennessee and then in Kentucky. After the War he returned to Joliet, where he took up the practice of law like his father, and also began to cultivate a number of commercial interests.

So Nellie's marriage counted as a good match, judged by the conventional standards of her day. She and Augustus had one child only, Alice May Osgood, who was born in 1872. Life seemed to be going forward smoothly for her along the well-trodden paths of Joliet society.

And then in November, 1883, Nellie up and abandoned those comfortable paths. She took her daughter Alice and left Joliet forever. So far as I can tell, neither mother nor daughter ever returned, not even to visit old friends and relations. Family tradition has nothing to say about why Nellie did this. If I had to guess from what I know of her later life, she left partly out of restlessness and sheer boredom with Joliet society. Also, she appears to have had problems with her health most of her adult life, and she may have hoped that it would improve if she lived in a warmer climate than Joliet could offer.

Augustus remained behind in Joliet and in Chicago, tending to all his business interests there. Toward the end of 1894 he dropped dead of a sudden heart attack after eating his breakfast in a Chicago hotel where he was staying at the time, just as his father had done 23 years earlier.

[62] Its official name was the New Haven Collegiate and Commercial Institute, but it placed heavy emphasis on military training and was informally called Russell's Military Institute.

Augustus Algernon Osgood

Husband and wife seem to have remained on amicable terms with one another despite her departure, since she received many of his personal possessions after his death. The newspaper clippings in her scrapbooks show, too, that she kept up a lively interest for the rest of her life in the doings of her husband's relatives in Joliet.

At first Nellie and her daughter went to Texas, where they stayed for more than a year with the family of Judge Jones Green Griner. My mother believed that they and the Griners were already friends by then. But I have no idea where or how the two families had become acquainted. The Griner's daughter Madge was about the same age as Alice, and the two girls became life-long friends.

After about sixteen months with the Griners, on April 3, 1885, Nellie and her daughter left for the San Francisco Bay area. (She made a note of the precise date in one of her scrapbooks.) They and the Griners continued to keep in touch. Nellie's scrapbooks contain a newspaper clipping about a visit the Griners made to see them in San Francisco right around the time of the Great Earthquake and Fire of 1906.

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California has always been celebrated as a land where anything goes, especially in matters of religion, spirituality and alternate forms of belief and practice. By 1880

there were very many Spiritualists and at least one congregation of Swedenborgians in the San Francisco Bay area, as well as scattered representatives of many other unconventional spiritual movements (among them, Paschal Beverly Randolph's Triplicate Rosicrucian Order). About 30 miles north of the Bay, in Santa Rosa, Thomas Lake Harris's highly controversial commune of sexual mystics, the Fountain Grove Community, was already well established by 1880.

During the 1880s and 1890s a great many alternative religious movements sprang up in the San Francisco Bay area, or were imported there from elsewhere in the nation. Among them were several varieties of New Thought, some of them more or less home-grown (Malinda Cramer's and Annie Rix Militz's versions), others imported (Emma Curtis Hopkins' version). New Thought's older sister, Christian Science, was brought to San Francisco in 1889 (by Sue Ella Bradshaw). Rosicrucians, Theosophists of several sorts, Gnostics, and the like contributed, too, to the Bay Area's heady mix of alternate and unconventional faiths and practices.

When Nellie arrived in the San Francisco Bay area, she seems to have taken to this alternate world of belief like a duck to water, and she never looked back. To go by her scrapbooks, already in her Joliet years she was interested in New Thought, in Spiritualism, and particularly in the radical sort of Free Thought put forth by Robert G. Ingersoll, the "Great Agnostic."

However, none of the other people and institutions just mentioned left any trace in those scrapbooks. Instead, once she arrived in California, it was minor figures like Max Mühlenbruch, "The Prophet of Alameda," who held her interest. Foremost among them was Nellie Beighle, "The Little Doctor," a Spiritualist who healed illness by the power of her "electric arm." It was the Little Doctor who seems to have made the strongest impression on my great-great-grandmother in San Francisco. The two of them even seem to have become friends to some degree, more than just a patient and her doctor. Among the postcards that great-great-grandmother saved are a few sent by Nellie Beighle while on vacation.

Nellie Beighle seems to have been a well-known figure in the San Francisco Bay area for several decades. Even in her old age, when she slipped while crossing a street and was crushed to death under a passing cable car, she was well enough known that an article about her was published on the front page of the second section of the *Oakland Tribune* (February 18, 1916). She was born in Canada, but came to San Francisco as a child in the late 1850s. In 1879 she was converted to Spiritualism, and very soon became both a medium and a healer. Her fame grew, and soon she had a very large practice as a non-medical healer. (Great-great-grandmother was one of her regular patients.) She also published two books, a very thick tome titled *Book of Knowledge—Psychic Facts* (1903, expanded ed. 1908) and a small, thin booklet of her own *Psychic Poems* (1907). In 1915 she attempted to launch a journal, *La Courrier—The Messenger,* but only four monthly issues of it ever appeared.

In 1905 Nellie Beighle was arrested and tried on the charge of practicing medicine without a license. In her defense she said that she had never practiced medicine, nor given anyone any prescription, but simply healed the sick by the powers that her spirit guides had given her. More than a hundred people who appreciated her work crowded the courtroom, ready to testify in her support, but testimony on the effectiveness of her treatments was not admitted by the judge. The jury, however, found her Not Guilty after less than an hour's deliberation.[63]

Among the people who came to court ready to testify on her behalf was my great-great-grandmother, who after the trial swore out an affidavit stating how she had been healed of a large tumor in her abdomen by the Little Doctor. Hers and other such affidavits were published in a pamphlet by Nellie Beighle in 1905.[64] In great-great-grandmother's case, the effects of the Little Doctor's healing did not last all that long. Nellie Osgood died from cancer of the uterus in 1910.

It may be of some interest that one of great-great-grandmother's scrapbooks, which mostly contains recipes, *does* include a prescription for a remedy given to her by the Little Doctor. The stained condition of that page suggests that great-great-grandmother consulted it in her kitchen far more than any other page in her book of recipes. It seems that the Nellie Beighle was not being completely honest when she told the court that she had never given anyone a prescription.

Great-great-grandmother Nellie, as already noted, had only one child, my great-grandmother Alice. I will tell Alice's stories below. But first I need to say something about her Osgood ancestors.

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[63] James J. Owen published a laudatory biography of her, *Our Little Doctor: Nellie Craib-Beighle and the Magic Power of Her Electric Hand,* in 1893. He also published a second edition of this biography in 1911, which, however, was much shorter and far less specific than the first edition. Owen was also the publisher of the *San Jose Mercury,* and an ardent Spiritualist.

[64] The pamphlet was republished as a new last chapter in the second edition of the *Book of Knowledge* (1908).

9
The Osgood Family

THREE MEN WITH THE SURNAME OSGOOD came from England to Massachusetts Bay Colony in the 1630s: Christopher, John and William. Since they all came from the same small region in England, and since Osgood was always a very, very rare English surname, it is likely that the three men were related to one another, but the precise details have been lost to time.

Christopher was the first to arrive; he came in 1634 together with his second wife and one child, an infant daughter, by his late first wife. They settled in Ipswich. By his second wife he had five children in Ipswich, three daughters and two sons. His eldest son was named Christopher, too.

That son lived a very long life of about 80 years, in the course of which he had sixteen children by four successive wives. Only two of his children were sons, and his eldest son was again named Christopher.

This Christopher, the third of that name in our line of descent, had two wives and nine children, and all but two of those children were sons. Yet again his eldest son was named Christopher. This son repeated the same pattern in his turn: he had three daughters and two sons, and he, too, named his eldest son Christopher. And once again, that son had one daughter and six sons, and his eldest son was named Christopher. His youngest son, however, was named Luther, and it is Luther who is our Osgood ancestor in the sixth generation.[65]

Thus there were five successive generations of men named Christopher Osgood in our line of descent. The middle three of them all worked at the same rare trade: each of them was a millwright. This was the complex trade of building mills on the banks of rivers to be powered by the flow of water in the river. A millwright had to be able to work in stone as well as in wood. He had to know how to choose just the right sort of stone for the millstones, and how to cut a millstone in just the right way. He had to know how to make not only the building for the millhouse, but also the wooden waterwheel. He had to know how to make the complex wooden and metal machines that would allow a miller to regulate the flow of the water, the speed of the millstones, and the closeness of the upper and lower millstones to one another as they ground grain. He also had to know how to build the millrace in and near the river despite the river's continual flow of water. And so forth. There were not many men in the colonies who had the ability to build a good watermill. (And then, too, there were also windmills that a millwright might be asked to build—a somewhat different set of skills was needed for that work.)

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[65] Ira Osgood, *A Genealogy of the Descendants of John, Christopher and William Osgood,* edited by Eben Putnam (1894), pp. 253-261, 263, 267, 278-279.

The first of these five Christophers died relatively young, in his forties. Not long after his death, his surviving family moved to Andover, where John Osgood had already settled.

It is not common knowledge that the infamous witch hunt that rocked Salem, town and village, in 1692, also spilled over into Andover. When it did, Christopher [Jr.]'s daughter, Mary (Osgood) Marston, was caught up in the hysteria. She was held in the squalid jail at Salem for five months, fearing for her life. Fortunately for her, the prosecution of all the remaining witchcraft cases collapsed before sentence could be passed on her, and she was set free at last.[66]

Christopher Osgood [Jr.]'s descendants in the next three generations left Andover for other towns in New England. In the sixth generation, however, Christopher [V]'s son, Luther Osgood, left New England altogether, taking his new wife with him, and they bought a farm in the undeveloped lands of Chenango County, in western New York. His farm was where the town of Preston would be established a few years later. There he lived, raised a family of ten children, and saw them all well launched on their own lives.

Two of Luther's children were boys. His older son, also named Luther, continued to work the family farm in Preston all his days. Luther's younger son was named Uri, and he was born in 1809. He was the seventh generation in our line of descent from our immigrant ancestor, Christopher Osgood.

Life on a farm struck Uri Osgood as far too limiting. He was an ambitious young man, and he was also intelligent. So he set out to become a lawyer by the usual method (in those days) of reading law with an older, established lawyer in a town close by, and soon he was admitted to the Chenango County bar. He made his home and had his practice in the town of Oxford.

According to family lore, Uri was severely disappointed in love, and so he left Chenango County forever. He arrived in Joliet, Illinois, in 1836, only two years after the town was first laid out. He was 27 years old then, handsome, accomplished, and rendered darkly mysterious by hints about the severe romantic disappointment that he had recently suffered.

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[66] Other people from Andover, too, were charged with witchcraft and jailed at Salem. Some of them were related to Christopher Osgood's family by blood or marriage, including John Osgood's daughter-in-law, Mary (Clements) Osgood. The most useful summary of the witchhunt at Andover, with the genealogies of all the people involved, is by Enders A. Robinson, *Salem Witchcraft and Hawthorne's House of the Seven Gables* (1992). Despite its title, this book is chiefly concerned with Andover, not Salem.

Joliet was still a tiny frontier town in 1836.[67] Its streets were made of mud, and it was still very sparsely settled. Pigs roamed its streets freely. But it was well situated on the Illinois River, which was then still the principal route for shipping goods between Chicago and the Mississippi River. Uri saw its promise and hung out his shingle. As his luck would have it, he was the first lawyer to settle in Joliet, and there was need for his expertise. As his skill would have it, he quickly prospered; and soon he also became the first banker in Joliet.

Such a man was bound to be of interest to most of the single women and girls in town who were old enough to marry. The one who beat out all her rivals and caught his eye was Caroline Virginia Aldrich, a daughter of the genial man who kept the Joliet Hotel, where Uri had lodged when he first came to Joliet.[68] She seems to have been delighted to carry away such a prize from all her rivals.

In her old age Caroline looked back on her married life with great contentment and pleasure. She and Uri were married on the January 1, 1839. They had arranged for a minister to officiate, but he did not show up on time, so a local judge performed their nuptials. They had thought about taking their honeymoon in Chicago, but the mud on the roads at that time of year was too deep for travel. So they had to content themselves with a grand ball at another hotel in town, newly built and much more elegant than the rough-hewn, slab-sided, unpainted Joliet Hotel where they had first met, and they went home together after the ball.

Caroline was only 14 years old when she married Uri; at 29, he was slightly more than twice her age. No doubt she understood fairly well, even at 14, the physical side of what would happen in her marriage bed, and figured she would be fine with it. Pretty much every girl on the frontier understood such things, back in the days of one-room cabins, where the entire family usually slept together in a single large bed. Dogs, too, roamed free in the street, mating right out in the open.

And so Caroline Virginia (Aldrich) Osgood had her first child when she was 15 years old, and seven more children thereafter. In her old age she recalled that when her first child arrived, she had still not quite finished playing with her dolls. But her husband was well off, and they had servants to help her with all the child care and the housework. It is perfectly clear, from a long newspaper interview with her

[67] In 1836 Joliet was still called Juliet, to match a neighboring town called Romeo. It was only in 1845 that the boosters—there are always boosters, no matter how small the town!—changed its name to Joliet, after the French explorer who first mapped the region in 1673.

[68] Her father, the hotel-keeper, was Fenner Aldrich, a descendant in the sixth generation from George Aldrich, progenitor of almost every Aldrich or Aldridge family in the United States. Alas, I have no stories to tell about Fenner's ancestors. Fenner himself played a large role in the early history of Will County. He died in 1884.

toward the end of her life, that she felt she had had an exceptionally good, comfortable life, and was well pleased with it all.[69]

Six of Caroline and Uri's children survived into their adulthood and married: three boys and three girls. Augustus was the eldest of the six, born a few days short of nine months after his parents' marriage.

As the years went by, Uri kept on climbing higher and higher up the ladder of wealth, privilege and power. The house he built for his family was one of the grandest in all Joliet, and the street on which it stood was soon renamed Osgood Street. He served as the first Illinois State's Attorney for Will County. He entered politics, served as an Alderman on the Joliet city council, and was elected to the Illinois Senate in 1852.

With the Civil War looming up on the horizon, Uri ran for Congress in 1858 on the Democratic ticket, but lost to his popular Republican opponent, the abolitionist Owen Lovejoy.

In politics, Uri appears to have supported Stephen A. Douglas and the established Democratic Party, and to have taken an active part in trying to thwart the plans of the upstart Republican Party in general, and those of Abraham Lincoln in particular.

Uri was one of the leading members of the first Universalist Church in Joliet, and also a Freemason. One account of him described him as "portly, courtly, courteous; too dignified to swear, he never took an oath, but always affirmed."[70]

All in all, it is clear that Uri played a very large role in the early history of Joliet and Will County.

And then Uri dropped dead with hardly any warning right after breakfast in 1871, apparently of a sudden heart attack. His wife was in New York at the time of his death, assisting one of their daughters who had fallen ill.

Here is an engraved portrait of him as an influential older citizen of Joliet.[71]

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[69] A clipping of the entire interview was pasted into one of great-great-grandmother Nellie's scrapbooks. As usual, she did not identify either the newspaper or the date of the issue. It may be from the *Joliet Republican.* Internal evidence suggests that it was published when its subject was very old, but still living, which is to say, not very many years before 1905.

[70] W. W. Stevens, *Past and Present of Will County, Illinois* (1907), p. 200.

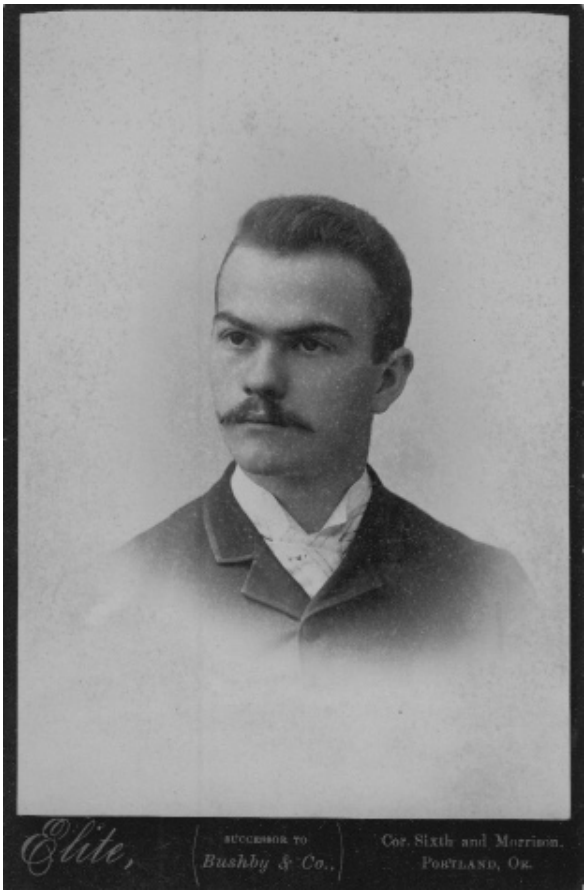
[71] George H. Woodruff (and others), *The History of Will County, Illinois* (1878), p. 293.

Wm Osgood
(DECEASED)
JOLIET

10
Alice May Osgood
and
Newton Hubert Lussier

ALICE WAS AUGUSTUS AND NELLIE'S ONLY CHILD, born in Joliet in 1872. When her mother left Joliet in 1883, Alice went with her mother, first to Texas, and then in 1886 to the San Francisco Bay Area. They lived in Oakland at first, probably in rented quarters, since their street address changed every few years.

It was in Oakland that Alice met her husband-to-be, Newton Hubert Lussier. They married in 1892, when she was not quite 20 years old; he was 29 at the time.



Newton Hubert Lussier
in 1892

Alice May (Osgood) Lussier
in 1892

Newton was working as a clerk in the store of W. B. Hardy, which sold newspapers, periodicals, books, and all sorts of stationery and office supplies. He continued in that line of business for almost the rest of his life.

In time he was able to open a stationery store of his own, but he found that he could not support his family with it, so he resumed working for others. Here he is in front of his store on Broadway in Oakland in January, 1898:

Newton H. Lussier in front of his store
(January 19, 1898)

In 1901 Newton and Alice were able to move across the Bay to San Francisco, where they set up housekeeping at the very fashionable address of 1224½ Haight Street.[72] Alice's mother lived with them at that address until she died in 1910. In those days Nellie had a steady income from her late husband's Civil War pension; probably it helped the family afford to live there. Right after Nellie died, Newton and Alice moved back across the Bay to Berkeley. There at last they could purchase a house

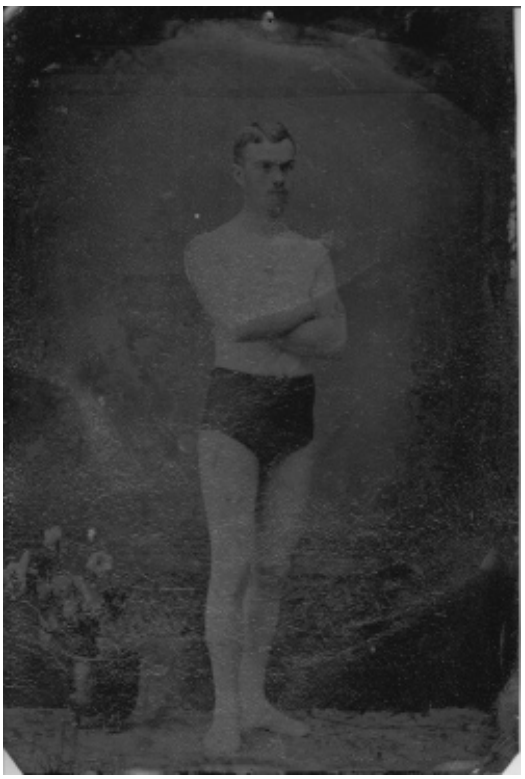
[72] This was one of two apartments on the same floor of a triple-decker house. The address of the other apartment on the same floor was simply 1224. The house survived the Earthquake and Great Fire of 1906, and is still there.

entirely their own, at 1709 Woolsey Street.[73] It would be their home for the next three decades.

Alice had grown up very like her mother in that she was strongly interested in unconventional spirituality and, more broadly, in everything weird and bizarre. She, too, held to the leading tenets of New Thought and Christian Science, that Mind held complete sway over Matter and that Thoughts were the only Things of genuine Power.

Nor was Newton at all conventional in such matters. He had been raised in the Swedenborgian Church, which was founded on the esoteric and visionary teachings of Emmanuel Swedenborg.

On a less esoteric level, Newton was a gymnast in his younger years. Here is an old tintype of him in his gymnast's costume:



[73] Before they moved to San Francisco, Newton and Alice had lived in Oakland with his widowed mother, Emma Caroline (Talmadge) Lussier. After they left Oakland, Emma lived in the households of some of her other children until she died in 1911.

Judged by mundane standards, the household which Alice and Newton established on Woolsey Street was a very weird one. They held Spiritualistic séances in order to speak with the dead. They kept a parrot and a monkey as exotic pets. They let it be known that any of the Rom ("gypsies," as they were called in those days) who were passing through Berkeley might take a meal with the family and count on a little other help as needed. When a carnival came to town, too, they sought out the freaks and the carneys and invited them to dinner. And so on ...

Later Alice acquired a real human skull—an anatomical specimen that had been prepared in the late 1800s—from a friend who was a medical doctor. It "lived" in a hatbox that also held all her old photographs of her family, the living and the dead alike. My mother once mentioned that Alice would do something with the skull and her ancestral photographs at Hallowe'en, but she hadn't paid much attention to such things when she was a girl and she couldn't remember the details. She also told me that fairies lived in the garden of that house, and she used to see them when she was a girl.

All in all, it was a very odd household my great-grandparents kept on Woolsey Street.

Newton and Alice had their first (and only) child in 1896, and named her Zena Huberta Lussier. Zena seems to have been a popular girl's name in Joliet back in the day, though it was rare in California, and of course Huberta was the feminine variant of her father's middle name, Hubert. No doubt, too, the fact that both names were uncommon, at least in California, only added to their charm for Zena's parents.[74]

As already mentioned, Newton began to find it harder to support his family on his earnings from the stationery business alone. Their house on Woolsey Street was a fairly large one, so they began to take in a boarder or two. One of them was Chester Earl Jones, who managed a miniature golf course. Newton became Earl's partner in his golf course, too. Even so, money was scarce in those years. (Those were also the years leading up to the so-called Great Depression.)

In 1930 Newton fell sick with cancer of the colon, worsened, and eventually died. He was just 63 years old.

By then he and his wife had adopted at least some parts of the world view of Christian Science, namely, that such things as sickness and death are primarily errors of thought, not physical necessities imposed on humans by their material bodies—indeed, the whole material world is itself just a mere error of shared

[74] Two years before Zena was born, an eccentric Californian had published at her own expense a very odd little work of magical fantasy, *The Witch Hypnotizer* (1892, 42 pages). Her name was Zena A. Maher, and I know nothing else about her. I have always wondered whether Alice happened upon that book somewhere, or knew its author, and had been influenced by her when she named her daughter.

thought, a vast collective illusion. The thought or expectation, therefore, of a person's impending death could itself prove lethal and bring about the demise of that person. Mind over Matter!

Newton had been one of nine children born to his parents, Louis Olezerne and Emma Caroline (Talmadge) Lussier. However, by 1930 only three of his siblings remained alive: his sisters Carrie and Della and his brother Olezerne. Because of Newton and Alice's fear of the effect of negative thoughts on his health, his sisters and brother were not allowed to enter his house at all to have the comfort of a last visit with him.

Naturally, this led to very hard feelings, which they directed toward Newton's widow. So it must have been quite a surprise when, a year or so later, the doorbell rang and there was Newton's sister, Della. The conversation, so I was told, went something like this:

— Dell? Won't you come in?
— No thank you, Allie, I won't come in. I'm just stopping by to tell you that I've taken Newton's ashes. They're not where you put them any longer. And I'm never going to tell you where they are now. You can't have him back.

We never did learn where Della put Newton's ashes, though I can guess. (I'll talk about that in the next chapter, which will be about the Lussier family.)

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In 1931, soon after Newton's death, Alice married again; her new husband was Earl (Chester Earl Jones, their boarder), with whom Newton had partnered in owning a miniature golf course.[75] Alice had just turned 59 years old, but she claimed to be 40 on the marriage certificate that they filed; Earl was 32 years old.

In 1940 Earl and Alice moved to a new address, 1912 Monterey Avenue, in a more upscale neighborhood of Berkeley. By then my mother and father had gotten married, and were living in New York. My aunt, Muriel, was still unmarried, and lived with her mother and step-father in their new home.

Alice and Earl's marriage lasted about fifteen years, until 1945, and then Earl left her. The story I was told was that Alice's weird ways got to be too much for him, and

[75] Newton's ashes were first buried in the plot that Alice had bought in Sunset View Cemetery, in El Cerrito. Eventually Alice's own ashes and those of their daughter Zena were buried in the same plot, long after Newton's ashes had been removed. When I checked the records of that Cemetery for Newton's burial, I saw who had signed the papers to have his ashes disinterred, and to whom they had been delivered. It was none other than Alice's second husband, Earl. Alice never found out what had become of Newton's ashes, which shows that Earl never told her of the part he played in the business. No doubt Della had paid Earl quite well to do this for her, and to keep silent afterwards.

he also had fallen for the woman who kept the books for his golf course. Her name, I was told, was Helena, but records of the couple give her name as Helen.

Alice continued to live in her Monterey Avenue house until she died, in September, 1951. With her lived her granddaughter, Muriel, and soon also Muriel's husband, Richard Allen Perry, who had recently returned from World War II in Alaska.

12
The Lussier Family

NEWTON'S PARENTS were Louis Olezerne Lussier and Emma Caroline Talmadge. They were married in Lockport, Illinois, in 1855. She was 20 years old, he was 23.

Lockport, like Joliet, was a city on the Illinois and Michigan Canal. The company that built and maintained the canal had its headquarters in Lockport, and Emma's three brothers were boatwrights; their father was a carpenter as well as a boatwright. It seems likely that Emma's family had moved to Lockport to build the boats that would ply the waters of the newly opened canal. (Lockport and Joliet are only about 5 miles apart.)

Emma's more distant Talmadge ancestry is not entirely certain, but the most likely interpretation of the available data is that she was in the ninth generation from her earliest immigrant ancestor, Thomas Talmadge, who had come to Boston in 1631, and whose son, Thomas [Jr.], settled on Long Island, New York.[76]

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The ancestry of Emma's husband, Louis Olezerne Lussier, has remained completely obscure in its details. He may even have deliberately obscured it, for compelling reasons.

What is certain is that Louis was born in Canada in 1832 and that he was French Canadian by ancestry.[77] It is almost as certain that he did ***not*** spend much of his childhood within the French-Canadian Catholic community of Canada, but was raised somewhere in English-speaking Canada or in the United States. He felt no

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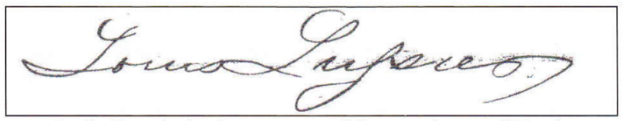
[76] The parents of Emma and Charles were Samuel C. and Sarah (Ayers) Talmadge. Samuel's line of descent from his earliest immigrant Talmadge ancestor was probably Thomas^{1} → Thomas^{2} → Nathaniel^{3} → Daniel^{4} → Thomas^{5} → Daniel^{6} → Noah^{7} → Samuel^{8}. The line of descent from Thomas^{1} to Thomas^{5} is well documented, as is the line of descent from Daniel^{6} to Samuel^{8} and Emma^{9}. Of all the known Talmadges in the generation before Daniel^{6}, only Thomas^{5} is suitably placed to be Daniel^{6}'s father, and it is known that Thomas^{5} had other children whose names have been forgotten. See Arthur White Talmadge, *The Talmadge, Tallmadge and Talmage Genealogy* (1909), pp. 55-56[#86], 76-77[#201], 313-318[#1=?#429]. — Eventually Emma's oldest brother, Charles V. Talmadge, went farther west to California, and established a profitable farm and ranch at Vorden, a town near the Sacramento River, which was carried on by his children after his death. Emma and her family would occasionally visit their relatives there; my aunt, Muriel, who was Emma's great-granddaughter, remembered one of those visits, years after both Emma and her brother Charles had died.

[77] Like nearly every other person of French Canadian ancestry with the surname Lussier, he was quite likely a descendant of Jacques Lussier (or L'Huissier), who had come from France to Quebec in 1666.

loyalty to the Catholic Church.[78] He seems to have spoken English without an accent. He pronounced his surname in an English manner, as Lew-SEAR, with the accent still on the last syllable, but the vowel letters given their English values. The penmanship of his signature suggests that he had been taught to write in an English-language school, not a French Catholic one.[79]



L. O. Lussier's signature on his marriage affidavit, September 22, 1855

He was a citizen of the United States, but there is no evidence that he was ever naturalized in his own right. This could indicate that his father had come to the United States and had been naturalized while Louis was still a young child.

Louis spent all but the last decade of his adult life in Illinois, living and working in towns along the waterway that ran south-westerly from Chicago to the Mississippi River at St. Louis, Missouri.[80] (The Illinois and Michigan Canal formed the northern part of this waterway; its southern part was the Illinois River.) It is probably here that one must look for his parents. And in fact there was one and only one French-Canadian family with the surname Lussier (or L'Huissier) living there from the late 1830s to the early 1850s.

The head of that family was also named Louis. (We will call him "Louis Senior" to distinguish him from Louis Olezerne Lussier.) Louis Sr. appears in the 1840 Federal census as a lone male, between 31 and 40 years old, born in Canada but living in St. Louis. In the 1850 Federal census he is still living in St. Louis, but by then his wife has come from Canada to live there with him, and they have a young daughter, born in that city in 1844. Louis Sr. also appears in several business directories for St. Louis from 1840 down to the early 1850s, where he is listed as a retail grocer. He and his family seem to have left the area shortly after 1853, when his daughter was about 10 years old, and around the time of Louis Olezerne's marriage in Lockport.

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[78] His wife was of English and Protestant ancestry. They were married by a justice of the peace, not by any priest or minister. None of their children were baptized in infancy as either Catholic or Protestant. The names they gave their children were, for the most part, very uncommon ones, but they were all English names, not French ones.

[79] This signature appears on his marriage license, signed in 1855. I reproduce it here from my article cited in footnote 82.

[80] The parts of Illinois and Missouri that lie along this waterway between Chicago and St. Louis form a distinct cultural region in their own right, with an an American-English dialect of its own that is clearly different from the dialects of the territories alongside it. (In recent dialect maps of American English it is called the "St. Louis Corridor," though its central line shifted somewhat eastward during the 20th century, as motor traffic along Route 66 displaced travel by boat along the waterway.)

These records are commonplace enough, but Louis Sr.'s backstory is anything but commonplace. The land where he was born and raised, a part of what is now Canada, had been colonized by France as early as the 1500s. Originally it was known as "New France" *(Nouvelle-France).* However, New France had been taken from France by Great Britain as spoils from a war between the two nations the 1760s.

Rule by English-speaking Protestant Great Britain did not sit well with the French-speaking Catholic populace of the region, and by the 1830s rebellion was in the air. This led to the armed insurrection that is now called the Patriot War of 1836–1837. Louis Sr. was one of the insurrectionists, and it was he who did a deed that made his name particularly odious to the British.

In 1837, during that insurrection, a British army officer, Lieutenant George Weir, who was traveling by himself, was taken prisoner by armed French-Canadians in the parish of St.-Denis-sur-Richelieu—the very parish where Louis Sr. had been born and raised. Lt. Weir was transported the next day by four men to the parish of St.-Charles-sur-Richelieu for further interrogation by higher officials in the insurrection, and Louis Sr. was one of those four men. While on the road, Lt. Weir attempted to escape, but he was violently seized by his captors and seriously injured in the process. Louis Sr. then killed their captive with a single pistol shot.

Soon the four men were arrested, held in the prison at Montreal, and convicted of high treason and the murder of Lt. Weir. Louis Sr. was sentenced to be hanged. Yet he, alone of the four, managed to escape from prison in some mysterious way. The British soon learned that he had made his way to the United States, where they could not follow his trail further. When the Government of Lower Canada thought it prudent to grant amnesty in 1838 to almost all of the rebels, Louis Sr. was one of the very few rebels who were excluded by name from that amnesty.

In the United States, of course, memories of the War of Independence and the War of 1812 were still very fresh in 1837, and Great Britain was commonly regarded by the citizenry as their arch-enemy. Louis Sr., as a rebel against the British Crown, could feel safe as long as he cared to live in the United States.

Eventually the political tides shifted enough in Canada that Louis Sr. and his family could safely return to his native land, which they did sometime around 1855. They settled in Montreal, where they had gotten married in 1829. Their daughter, Marie Adelaide, married a prominent Franch-Canadian politician, Alphonse Ouimet, in 1866.

Louis Sr. and his wife, Marie Adelaide Boyer, were married about eight years before the events of 1837. Presumably they had children during those years, which Marie Adelaide would have continued to raise while her husband was in prison and then while he was establishing himself in the United States. The odd thing, however, is that there is no record of the birth or baptism of *any* of those children of theirs in the well-preserved French-Canadian Catholic parish records from the years between

1829 and 1837.[81] It seems likely that Louis Sr.'s rebellion had an anti-clerical component, and that he and his wife did not actually present their children for Catholic baptism.

So there are no records that would show whether Louis Olezerne Lussier was a son of Louis Sr. and his wife, or was not. (His absence from the 1850 Federal Census record of Louis Sr.'s family proves nothing one way or the other. He turned 18 years old during 1850, and in those days many a young man of 18 would already have left home and begun to make his own way in the world.)

Even so, it seems far more likely than not that Louis Olezerne Lussier was a son of Louis Lussier Sr. and his wife Marie Adelaide Boyer. And it also seems likely that he would not care to talk much about his parents, even to his own children.

Louis Olezerne Lussier was a portrait painter. No information survives to show where and how he learned his trade. The earliest documentary evidence we have for any aspect of his life, other than his marriage in 1855, comes from newspaper accounts of his work as an artist; the earliest such notice was published in the *Peoria Daily Transcript* in 1864. The 1860s, too, are the decade in which he painted his earliest surviving portraits.[82]

In those days a portrait artist had to travel to the homes of the well-off families that employed him to portray them; they would not usually come to him. However, he also kept a studio in Peoria, where he and his family lived.

In Peoria Louis discovered Emmanuel Swedenborg. Swedenborg had been a brilliant scientist, but also a mystic and an esotericist; his mystical writings had an enormous influence on the rise and development of almost every form of non-mainstream religion and every esoteric or occult movement in the United States during the 19th century. There was an active Swedenborgian church in Peoria in the 1860s. Louis joined that church in 1864, together with his first two children; in 1865 his wife joined the same church. Swedenborgian Church records are not available for Peoria in subsequent years, but it seems likely that they would have enrolled their later children, born in Peoria after 1864, in the same church.

In 1870 Louis and his family relocated to another city in the same state, Lacon. Four

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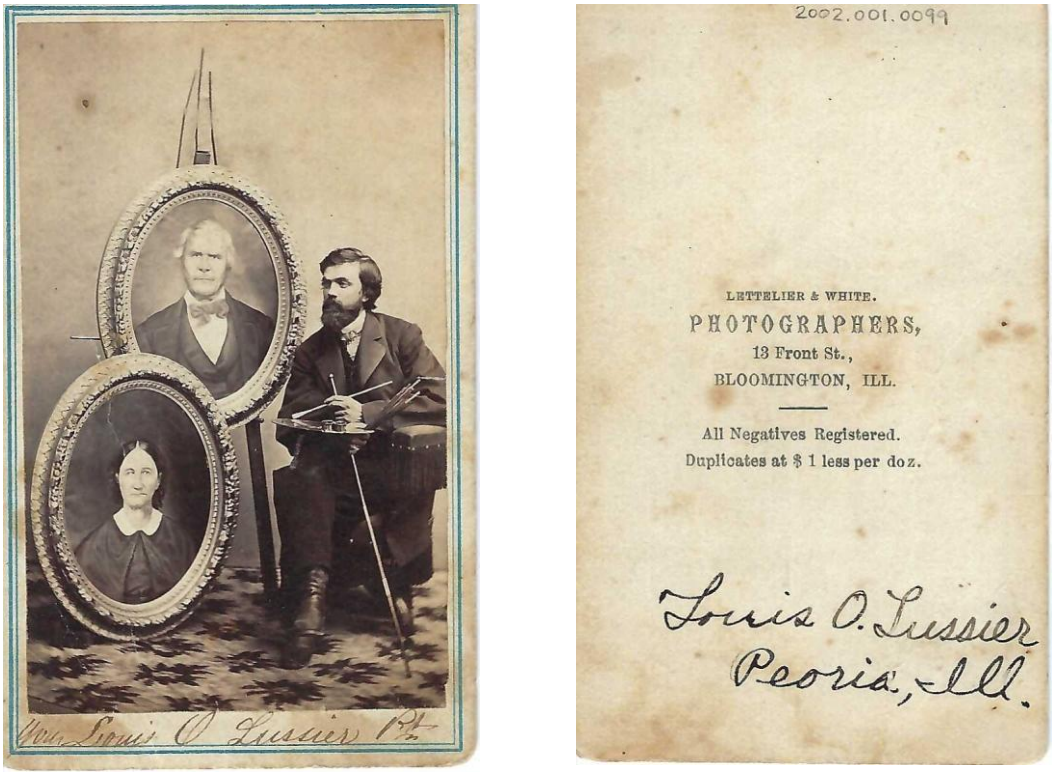
[81] Civil records of births, marriages and deaths were not kept in French Canada during the years in question.

[82] I wrote more about Louis Olezerne Lussier's career as an artist in a short biography of him that I contributed to an exhibition catalog by Merle H. Glick, *Louis O. Lussier, Illinois Portrait Artist (1832-1884),* published at Peoria in 2003 by the Lakeview Museum of Arts and Sciences. See pp. 6–12 for my contribution.

years later, in 1874, they left Illinois forever and moved to the San Francisco Bay area, where the economy was booming and opportunities abounded for a talented portrait painter. They lived in Oakland until Louis died of meningitis in 1884, though he had studios in San Francisco and San Jose as well. His wife survived him until 1911; after his death, she spent the rest of her years living in the home of one or another of her children in Oakland.

No photograph of Louis Olezerne Lussier came down to me in the family, but quite recently I learned that one has been preserved in the archives of the Funk Prarie Home Museum in Shirley, Illinois. Here he is shown with two of the portraits that he painted at some point during the 1860s, when he was living in Peoria.



Louis O. Lussier

Louis and Emma had nine children in all, of whom seven lived to maturity. Their first eight children were born in Illinois, the ninth in California. The seven children who lived to maturity were, in order of birth, Idalia, Willis, Newton, Carrie, Minnie, Della and Olezerne.

Newton was the only one of the seven who managed to lead a stable life with just one wife and child of his own, and also the only one who has living descendants today.

The oldest of the seven siblings, Idalia, entered into three very bad marriages, and she went insane during her last one; she died in 1895 while confined to the Agnews Insane Asylum at Santa Clara. From her first, very brief marriage she had one son, Lucien, who became nearly blind when he was three. His parents' divorce seems to have been a very bitter one, for Lucien's prosperous father fiercely resisted every request and fought every legal demand that he support his child in any way.[83] Idalia's mother and her brother Newton helped as much as they could with Lucien's support, but neither of them was all that prosperous, so the boy tried to earn what extra money he could as a sidewalk musician begging for charity. In 1907 Lucien starved to death in his Chicago lodgings, where he had gone in 1906 in hopes of making a career as a musician in vaudeville.

Willis and Olezerne followed their father's footsteps into art, although they preferred photography to painting.

Willis (who renamed himself William) took three wives in succession. Olezerne (who renamed himself Oliver) may have had one short-lived marriage. Minnie had at least four husbands, Carrie had three, and Della only two. None of the five had any children of their own.

Della and Carrie were the only two of Newton's Lussier siblings who were still alive when I was a boy. I met Della two or three times. She struck me as an independent, high-spirited woman, tiny, exquisite and beautiful.[84] I thought that she took after her father in her looks, though at the time I had no photograph of him for comparison. In her old age, after her second husband had died in 1948, she took a trip around the world all by herself, without any traveling companion. She was 91 years old when she died in 1964. She was the second longest-lived of all the Lussier siblings.

I met Carrie just once, briefly. I remember thinking that she looked very strong and determined. She greatly resembled her mother, whose photograph is below. She was 95 years old when she died in 1972, the longest-lived of all Louis Olezerne Lussier's children.

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[83] Lucien's father was Peter Bacigalupi, a well-known San Francisco businessman and entrepreneur in musical instruments, phonographs, and motion pictures. For a recent account of his life and career, see Fred Dahlinger, Jr., "Peter Bacigalupi, San Francisco, California," *Carousel Organ,* issue 42 (January 2010), pp. 34–37. Idalia's life, her first marriage, divorce and battles for child support, her third marriage to a minor Oakland politician, Andrew J. Duffy (who would murder a man in 1894 and be sentenced to a term in the State Prison at San Quentin), her descent into insanity, and her son's struggles and tragic death were all fodder for quite a number of human interest stories in the San Francisco newspapers for over thirty years, from 1877 to 1907.

[84] Della met her last husband in New York City, where she had traveled for some long-forgotten reason. She was riding the subway, and he was struck by her exquisite tiny feet, so he introduced himself in a gentlemanly fashion. Not long thereafter he came to California to court her. They were married in 1913.

Emma Caroline (Talmadge) Lussier

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And that brings us back to the question of what Della did with Newton's ashes, after she had taken them from the cemetery where Alice had put them.

Della had married her last husband, Albert L. Chauvet, in 1913. Albert's mother, Cordelia D. Chauvet, died in 1914; she had been living with them in Oakland. Albert and Della bought a fine cemetery plot, with perpetual care, in beautiful Mountain View Cemetery, and there Cordelia's coffin was interred. Cordelia's sister, Victoria A. McKenzie, eventually moved from New York to California as well; she died in 1935, and her coffin was buried in the same cemetery plot.

The records of Mountain View Cemetery show that an urn containing the ashes of Della's brother, Olezerne, was placed in Victoria's coffin before it was closed and

buried. Since Olezerne had died two years earlier, in 1933, it seems likely that Della had simply kept the urn with his ashes at home until there was a suitable occasion to add them to what she regarded as her family plot.

After Della's husband Albert died in 1948, the urn with his ashes was buried there, too, resting on top of his mother's coffin. And in 1964 the urn with Della's own ashes was also buried there, right next to her husband's. Those are still the only burials in that plot, so far as Mountain View Cemetery's records show.

However, if Della could keep her brother Olezerne's urn in her home from 1933 until a convenient occasion arose to bury it in her family plot, there is no reason why she might not have kept the urn with the ashes of her other brother Newton (who had died in 1930) in her home, too. I think it highly likely that Newton's urn was secretly buried in the same plot—buried there without any knowledge of the cemetery's officials! If they had no record of the burial, there would be no way for Alice to find out where Newton's ashes were and try to recover them.

How might Della have accomplished this? The easiest way would have been for her to put both sets of ashes into Victoria's coffin right before it was closed and buried. Perhaps she was able to put Newton's urn there unnoticed. Perhaps she had mixed both sets of ashes together in the single urn, and passed them off as Olezerne's only.

Yet everything I know about Della's character and personality, both from family stories and from very brief face-to-face meetings when I was a boy, lets me easily imagine another, more dramatic possibility as well. I think she was quite capable of going to the cemetery late some night, spade and urn in hand, and burying Newton's ashes in that plot herself, with or without her husband's help. The house where she lived in Oakland was less than a mile from an unobtrusive service gate in a low back wall of the cemetery.

13
Zena Huberta Lussier
and
H Clay Leatherman

ALICE AND NEWTON'S DAUGHTER, ZENA, did not like the household in which she grew up, with all its weird ways, so my mother said. So she got married as soon as she was old enough to marry without her parents' consent, just to get away from their weird home. That was in 1912. She was just 16 at the time, and the man whom she married, H Clay Leatherman, may simply have been the first man who showed an interest in her.[85] He was about 32 years old, twice her age, when they married, though he had said he was only 27. That marriage was an enormous mistake for them both!

H Clay Leatherman

Zena Huberta (Lussier) Leatherman

[85] His initial "H" didn't stand for any name, but was only a bare letter. This seems to be a custom in some German families, as a way of remembering a dead ancestor of the opposite sex from the child. He was always called "Clay" by his friends. The Leathermans are a Pennsylvania German family, and Clay was in the sixth generation from their first immigrant ancestor, Hans Dewalt Ledermann / Leatherman, who landed in Philadelphia in 1727: Hans[1] Dewalt Leatherman → Godfrey[2] → Godfrey[3] → Jacob[4] → Frederick[5] → Clay[6]. See I. John Letherman & Emma Leatherman Candler, *All Leatherman Kin History* (1940), pp. 5-6, 253-255, 408, 414, [generations 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6]. This genealogy offers no specifics for generation 2, but for generations 1–4 see several websites, including **www.hullhome.com/recher&leatherman.gen.htm** and **freepages.rootsweb.com/~deboyer39/genealogy/johannes_lederman/**

Clay had been born in 1879 in a tiny town, Wolfsville, in Frederick County, Maryland, where his father kept a general store.[86] A later historian of the region wrote, "Wolfsville once had the reputation of being a town so rough that the annual Sunday School picnic required the presence of state troopers to deal with the men who had enjoyed too much moonshine."[87]

Quite early in his life Clay left Wolfville. He told my mother how he was sleeping out by himself in the woods above Johnstown that day in 1889 when the dam above town finally gave way, and he watched the waters come down and wipe out the entire town. (The Johnstown Flood was the single greatest loss of human life in one disaster anywhere in the United States up to that time.)

Clay had just turned 10 years old at the time of the Johnstown Flood. It appears that he had already left home to make his own way in the world, since Johnstown is about 100 miles distant from Wolfsville. He soon learned his way around all sorts of metal work. In later documents he gave his occupation as mechanic or boilermaker or welder, but he could also make many other things from metal and wood. Among other things, he made fine rifles by hand with his own tools in his own shop. He also carved their wooden stocks with very detailed, stunningly beautiful hunting scenes. As a boy, I saw and marveled at two of these rifles that he had made. He also had made a stove-top still from sheet copper and copper tubing, so that he could make small batches of his own hard liquor in his kitchen.

Clay was most comfortable outdoors, camping or hunting or panning for gold for weeks on end; next to that he preferred working in his machine shop; spending time in a civilized household was a very distant third choice.[88]

Clay fathered two daughters on his wife, Zena, as soon as they were married. Edris Elva (my mother) was born in 1913, Muriel Zena in 1915. But he was neither a good father nor a good provider. It was sheer necessity that compelled them all to live together with Zena's parents in their house at 1709 Woolsey Street.

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[86] Wolfsville lies within the Catoctin District of Frederick County. In the 1880 United States Census, the entire Catoctin District held only 274 families.

[87] Marie Ann Erickson, *Frederick County Chronicles: The Crossroads of Maryland* (Charleston, S. C.: The History Press, 2012), p. 78.

[88] My mother told me that Clay had gone to Alaska, sometime in his younger years, to prospect for gold. That would most likely have happened in the later 1890s or early 1900s, during the Alaska gold rush, years before he married Zena. He continued to prospect for gold after his marriage, too.

Clay hated living in a house full of women. He had left his own home and family behind when he was just 10 years old, and never looked back. Alice and Zena were uncommonly *headstrong* women (that was my mother's word for them), who insisted on having their own way in everything. But Clay had an utterly ferocious temper, and hated to be crossed in anything. Zena soon grew tired of Clay and his temper, and he began to stay away from home more often and longer. They separated in 1924, and he took lodgings elsewhere.

My aunt, Muriel, once told me that when Alice would see him approaching their house, after he was no longer living there, she would call out to her granddaughters, "Girls, run and hide! Here comes your father!" And Edris and Muriel would run and hide.

The impression Clay left on me (even when I was a boy) was much the same: he struck me as a very dangerous man to cross even in the smallest things, though he could also be very amiable, even suave, whenever he wanted something from a person.

Clay died in 1957, 78 years old, from injuries received when he was struck by a car while crossing a major street in Berkeley at night. He was picked up soon enough by an ambulance, but he was unconscious and he died before he could receive any medical care beyond basic first aid.

Despite all this, Zena coped quite well with the demands life had placed on her. She had to go out and earn money to support her family, so she got up the necessary skills and went to work as a secretary, while her mother took care of her daughters.

There is a story that my mother told which sheds considerable light on Zena's cool-headedness and character. She and her family would go camping for several weeks in the summer. One summer their chosen campsite was high up on the side of a hill. The closest store was high up on the side of the next hill over. When they needed supplies, that could mean a long walk down from their campsite into the valley and then up from the valley to the store. However, there was also a high railroad trestle with a single track that ran between the two hills, and the very few trains that ever used that track seemed to run on a predictable schedule. So Zena and her daughters would walk to the store and back along the railroad track high up on the trestle.

And then one day, while they were halfway across the valley on that track, they heard a train whistle: an unscheduled train was coming, and coming fast. Many a parent would have panicked, and everyone would have died. But not Zena!

Zena calmly helped her daughters climb down between the railroad ties onto the trestle itself, and followed them. There they held on tight while the train roared past,

just a few feet over their heads. Then they pulled themselves back up onto the tracks and continued on their way to the store. When they had purchased their supplies, they took them back to their camp on that same railroad track.

In her adolescence Zena had discovered the romantic and melodramatic novels of Marie Corelli, who was the first novelist to publish "best-sellers" (in the modern sense of that term) in English, books unabashedly aimed at the "low-brow" popular market.[89] Corelli's novels were steeped in popular esoteric themes and fancies, and they must have resonated for Zena with the weirdness of her own family. She named her two daughters after characters in two of Corelli's novels: Edris got her name from *Ardath* (1889); Muriel, from *Ziska* (1897).

Zena also began to study Christian Science more deeply than her mother had ever done; she bought and read the standard set of Mary Baker Eddy's writings, as published by the Christian Science Church. (Alice had not owned those books.)

And then there was the postman who delivered their mail twice a day, and once on Sundays. He was a kind and good-looking single young man. His name was Gil. Zena fell for Gil and they became an item. She thought seriously about divorcing Clay and marrying Gil.

This greatly troubled my mother, Edris, who was terrified that after their divorce she might be placed by the court into the custody of her father. She begged Zena with all her might not to divorce Clay just yet, and Zena agreed to wait until Edris would turn sixteen and could decide for herself where she would live. By the time Edris turned sixteen, however, life had moved on, and Zena never got around to divorcing Clay or marrying Gil.

I asked my mother once, when we were talking about Gil, why she wanted Zena to stay married to Clay only until 1929, when Edris would turn sixteen, and not until 1931, when her sister Muriel would also turn sixteen. My mother got an utterly anguished expression on her face—the most distressed I ever saw her—and blurted out, "It was never a problem with Muriel!" My question had so obviously and deeply distressed her that I thought it kinder not to ask what "it" was. Yet I have wondered ever since whether her anguish meant that Clay had made frequent sexual advances to her, or had even forced himself on her. I would not put it past him, not in the least.

Then Zena, too, got seriously ill. It turned out to be breast cancer. True to her Christian Science principles, Zena refused to go to a hospital, refused all medical attention, and even refused any pain-killing drug. The last several months of her life were a nightmare for her entire family. She was in such pain that she screamed or cried or moaned in agony around the clock, except when she became unconscious

[89] Corelli was the acknowledged "natural" daughter of Charles Mackay, author of a famous book, *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds,* which has never gone out of print since the year it was first published (1841).

from sheer exhaustion. She died at home in 1935, holding to her principles until the very end. My mother and aunt remembered that Earl had been unfailingly kind to her throughout her last illness.

14
Edris Elva (Leatherman) Mathiesen

"AND WHAT OF EDRIS?" Marie Corelli asks toward the end of the final chapter in her novel *Ardath.* In her novel, Edris was both an angel and a perfect woman, able to draw men toward their higher and better nature. My mother, however, was every bit as human as the rest of her family

Edris and her sister, Muriel, had been left to grow up with little adult supervision or guidance, much less with any real parenting. Their father was rarely at home, and he was frightening when he was at home. Their mother, Zena, and her mother, Alice, both enjoyed an active social life and often went out together to events in the evening. And Zena was only 17 years older than Edris, who often said that she seemed to her daughters more like their much older sister than like their mother.

That left only Newton to care for his young granddaughters after he got home from work. He seems to have done a good job of it, since Edris and Muriel remembered him very fondly. But Newton died when Edris was 17 and Muriel 15. After his death, his two granddaughters were left to raise themselves largely unparented.

My mother had always wanted children, and in those days that usually presupposed marriage. Yet love and marriage were always highly problematic things for her. At times she would remark that she did not really know what love was, or have what it took to feel love. She felt that marriage would have to be based—at least for her—on respect and admiration, not on love. Here is what she wrote down for her children about her own marriage, many years after my father's death:[90]

> This was not a love match on my part, but your father was the person I wanted to marry, and I believe on your father's part, he was dreaming of me as someone he imagined. Somewhere along the early part of my life I developed an antipathy against marriage, and my idea of love was extremely different from most people's ideas. I believe respect and admiration [were] much more important than love, and that love was something that developed when those two feelings were present. I do not believe I was wrong at that young age, and feel the same way now. I told this to your Dad, but he wanted to marry me anyway, feeling that love would develop.

She also thought that my father, James Christian Mathiesen [Jr.], was the sort of man who would be a good father to her children. And so she married him on August 19,

[90] From her brief untitled account of her early married years (typescript). I have normalized the punctuation.

1938, at Carmel-by-the-Sea, California, while he was still on active duty in the U. S. Naval Reserve. He was stationed at the San Diego Naval Air Station in California, and so they lived there for about a year, until he went on inactive duty in 1940.

Since my father was so passionate about airplanes and flying, he arranged for Edris to take flying lessons. It wasn't long before she was able to fly solo and had earned her pilot's license. She was one of the first women in California to do that.

Around the time of their marriage, my parents took matching photographs of one another. The photograph of my father (in his uniform) can be seen in the chapter about him at the end of Part 1. Here is the matching photograph of my mother:

Edris Elva (Leatherman) Mathiesen

In the course of time they had two children, me (Robert Christian, born in 1942) and my brother (Thomas James, born in 1947). The first names of their children were the names of two of their friends at the time; the middle names reflected our father's middle and first names.

Each of my parents found marriage to the other very frustrating. It seems to me, in hindsight, that neither of them was equipped by nature and upbringing to give the other what he or she most needed in a marriage. Nevertheless each of them did the

best he or she could as a spouse and as a parent, and that was more than sufficient for me.

★ ★ ★

My mother found me a very difficult child to raise. As it was, neither she nor my father had been parented very well themselves in their own families, so they had no good examples to rely on. Also, when my brother and I were born, they were living on the other side of the continent all alone, separated by thousands of miles from any their relatives who might have offered aid, comfort and helpful advice. But she worked very, very hard at learning to be a good parent, and she managed it very well.

I had far more energy and far more curiosity than most of my age-mates. As my mother told me, I learned to run before I learned to walk, and I ran very fast, almost too fast for them to keep up with me for long.

I always found it hard to form solid, lasting friendships with other children, and I greatly liked spending time all by myself, usually reading. As a child, I also found it nearly impossible to accept authority, and I would often defy it openly—especially when I couldn't see the sense of what I was being told to do (or, more often, told *not* to do). Then, too, I was angry almost all the time—about what, I couldn't have said, even to myself—and many a night I had nightmares that utterly terrified me and woke up my parents.[91]

In short, I ran my poor mother ragged.

However, all this led to two of the most important lessons that she ever taught me, lessons which I have cherished all my days, and continue to learn from.

The first of those lessons was about dealing with my nightmares. What she said was roughly as follows:

> *Robby, when you're in your bed and starting to fall asleep, there will be a short time when you're not fully asleep. That is the special time when, if you look around, you can see the start of the first dream you're going to have. Take a good look at what you see. If you don't like it, or fear it will lead to a nightmare, then see it as a sort of picture drawn with chalk on a blackboard. You will find an eraser on the chalk-shelf of that blackboard. Take that eraser in your hand and erase the picture drawn there. Erase it really hard; get rid of every last trace of the chalk. Then you won't have that dream tonight.*

[91] This almost constant anger of mine could have been in part a genetic inheritance from my mother's father, Clay, whose ferocious temper was a legend in the family.

It took me a few months to get the hang of what she was teaching me, but I finally got it to work well enough that I rarely had nightmares any more.

A little while later she taught me the second part of that lesson, roughly as follows:

> *Now that you've learned how to get rid of dreams you don't want to have, the next thing to learn is how to have dreams that you will enjoy. To do that, wait for that same special time when you're almost asleep, but are still faintly aware that you're lying in bed. Look around for the same blackboard where you erased nightmares before they really got started. If there's a picture there, erase it and clear the blackboard. Then pick up the chalk, and draw the start of the dream you want to have. That's the first dream that you will have tonight.*

This was easier for me, since I had already gotten good at the first part of the lesson.

Her second valuable lesson came a few years later, when I was about 8 years old. I was still an angry child pretty much all the time. One day, in exasperation, she said,

> *Robby, if you don't get a hold of that temper of yours, someone is going to kill you someday!*

So I decided that I really had to get my anger under control, and very soon. But how?

What I actually ended up doing came from my earlier lessons on shaping dreams. I started paying close attention to myself and to my changing feelings, and whenever I saw myself getting enraged, I took up that same tool that I had used to get rid of nightmares, and used it to "erase" the rage.

I no longer needed to imagine that tool as an eraser for chalk on a blackboard, as I had a few years earlier when I was overmastering my nightmares. It was enough that I had already learned how to rein in my imagination. If I could do that much, I ought to be able to rein in my feelings, too. And that is just what I started doing. Again, it took me a few months until I really became good at my self-imposed task. But it took me less time get control of my feelings than I had needed to get control of my nightmares.

As already noted, my father died in 1970, when he was 59 years old. As has been the custom on both sides of our family for the last century or so, he was cremated. He wanted his ashes to be scattered from an airplane in flight out over the Pacific Ocean, and my mother did this for him.

My mother carried on for nearly fifty years after his death, supporting herself by her own efforts and leading an active and rewarding life. However, I and my family had moved to the East Coast in 1967, while she remained in California for a few years, remarried twice, moved to Arizona, divorced, and then moved to Utah to be near my brother, Thomas, and his wife, Penelope. Eventually she followed them to Indiana, where they took excellent care of her during her declining years—for which I have always been very grateful.

Because of distance and the overwhelming demands that my profession and my own family made on my own time and energy, I found it very hard to remain as involved with her and her life as I had been when we all lived together in California. So I am not as well informed about the last half of her life as I am about its first half and about her ancestors.

Edris herself lived to be 106 years old; she was almost exactly at the midpoint of her 107th year when she died in 2019. She, too, was cremated. According to her wishes, her ashes were discarded.

Thus neither of my parents has any final resting place. Nor do they have any lasting memorial anywhere, except for the memories of those who knew and loved them—and, now, this book.

My parents in 1970

Christmas together
(Thomas, James, Edris and Robert Mathiesen)
Pleasantville, 1947 or 1948

Back to Berkeley at Last

MY PARENTS LEFT CALIFORNIA for New York in the Fall of 1939, when my father began to work on the Norden Bombsight project. My parents were staunch Californians, who felt that their thirteen years on the East Coast were merely an interlude in their lives, spent in a strange and alien land.

As my father told me, even so simple a soda-fountain treat as a milkshake was made differently on the two coasts (at least in those days): in California it was always made with several scoops of ice cream; in New York, with no more than a single very small scoop. In New York he had to tell the "soda jerk" in detail, every single time, just how he wanted his milkshakes made. Back in California he could simply ask for a milkshake and get the treat he wanted. This annoyed him the whole time they lived on the East Coast.

In the course of their first eight years away from California, from September 1939, to June 1947, my parents lived at eight different addresses in succession, averaging a single year at each of them. I remember some of our moves from one address to the next, and I remember being very unsettled by each of them.

For our last years on the East Coast we lived in one place, at 62 Hays Hill Road in Pleasantville, New York. But we lived there only for 5½ years, which was hardly long enough for any of us, adults or children, to put down deep roots.

My mother, in particular, had always longed to return to her California hometown, to Berkeley, a city on the east side of the San Francisco Bay. And so I, too, learned to think of Berkeley as my hometown, even though I was neither born nor raised there. I hungered for roots, and for the stability that they offered.

Almost every summer, at least until my brother was born in 1947, we traveled to and from Berkeley for a few weeks' visit. Usually we flew, but we made one trip by train, where we had our own private compartment in a Pullman sleeping car. That trip took several days. Cross-country travel by airplane was much faster than by train, but much slower than it is now. The airplanes we flew on were driven through the air by propellers on the wings, and the whole trip from New York to California took twelve hours. Meal service was fairly elegant, at least by present-day standards. We got full hot meals, served on china plates and eaten with fine metal utensils, and our napkins were made from cloth. In those days, airplanes crossed the country at a much lower altitude than they do now. We usually flew from evening to morning. From my window seat I could see lights in the windows of isolated farmhouses at night, and the headlights of each lonely automobile on the highways—usually no more than one or two sets of headlights from horizon to horizon in the small hours of the night.

My brother was very susceptible to motion sickness, and both he and I had major health emergencies during our five years at Pleasantville, so we traveled to Berkeley much less often then.

We stayed at 1912 Monterey Avenue, where my great-grandmother Alice lived with my aunt and uncle, Muriel and Richard. They occupied the two bedrooms in the house; we slept in the front parlor, where there was a murphy bed for my parents and a crib or cot for me. It was a tight squeeze for all of us, but it worked.

In the Fall of 1951 great-grandmother Alice died, and we soon returned to California for good. My parents helped Muriel and Richard find another house not all that far away, in El Cerrito, and in the Fall of 1952 we drove across the country and moved into great-grandmother's house on Monterey Avenue. I was 10 years old at the time, and my brother was 5.

I remember that road trip fondly. We passed through Philadelphia, where we visited Independence Hall and I was able to touch the famous Liberty Bell, and then through Washington, D. C., where we saw the Washington Monument and the Jefferson and Lincoln Memorials.

Our route took us through Kentucky, where we toured Mammoth Caves, and stopped at a road-side attraction featuring a Petrified Man and the mortal remains of Frank and Jesse James. The Petrified Man looked fake, even to my child's eyes. Only my father went into the inner room with the James Brothers' coffins; when he came out, he said it was a gross thing to see, and that the bodies there could have been anyone's, and most likely not the James Brothers.

We crossed the Mississippi somewhere south of St. Louis and picked up Route 66, which took us through Oklahoma, the Texas Panhandle, New Mexico and Arizona. In Arizona we visited the Petrified Forest, and we climbed down into the meteor crater at Canyon Diablo near Winslow. At last we crossed the border into California and kept going as far as Los Angeles. There we left Route 66 for Route 101 and headed north to the San Francisco Bay. And so at last we came to Berkeley.

It felt to me like coming to an enchanted place, a city of story and history. Yet it was also a strange and unsettling place, as enchanted places are supposed to be. Weird fleshy plants—succulents of many kinds—grew everywhere. The air had a very different smell and texture, and the tap water had a noticeably different taste. Weirder yet, the seasons were not as I had known them on the East Coast: nature came alive in January with the seasonal rains, and there were no wonderful long months of snow—really, no snow at all in most years. And the morning fog, rich and thick and moist and grey, rolled in from the Bay almost every morning, veiling the dimly lit world in unearthly beauty.

Compared to the houses I had known back East, our house on Monterey Avenue struck me as very odd indeed. It had only one floor, and there was only a small finished cellar that occupied about one-tenth of the footprint of the house and served as a laundry room. The rest of the basement had a rough earthen floor, and since the house was built on a hill, the front of the basement had somewhat more than six feet of headroom, while the headroom at the back of the basement was only a little more than four feet. There was a small yard in back and a detached two-car garage, with a service area behind the garage where we burned our household trash every week in an old oil drum. Since we had only one car, half the garage was part storage, part workshop for my father's antique airplanes.

The basement and the closets were filled with many things to intrigue and delight a small, excessively curious boy. The basement held Clay's homemade copper still and some of his gunsmithing tools, as well as overflow from the closets—old books, old clothes, and so forth. There were shelves of empty stoneware crocks, in which great-grandmother had put up foodstuffs when times had been harder and she had been younger. In days long past those crocks had held hard-boiled eggs preserved in waterglass, pickled cabbage and sauerkraut, pickled onions and cucumbers, and other food that could get a family through lean days.

In the closets on the main floor were all sorts of wonderful things that Alice had saved: her mother's scrapbooks, and all her old family photographs—which were kept in the hatbox where the human skull also "lived." There were boxes of antique buttons, ration books from World War II that had never been completely used up, political buttons and tokens and pins dating from as far back as the Spanish-American War ("To Hell with Spain; Remember the Maine!") all the way down to the presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt ("Why Risk Dictatorship? No Third Term!").

The front parlor held a glass-fronted display case with further relics. It held two gazing crystals, one blue, the other pink, which had been cast to resemble solitaire-cut diamonds; two opium pipes; and a cow's cud. It held the ceremonial sabre which Alice's father had worn as part of his officer's uniform during the Civil War, and his badge as a member of the Grand Army of the Republic. There was an $8 banknote that had been issued by the Continental Congress in 1776, and a tiny octagonal 25-cent gold coin that had been minted by the State of California during the Gold Rush days.[92] There were two antique mustache cups that had come down in the family, and two old German stoneware beer tankards with hinged pewter lids. There were ... after all these years I don't remember what else!

Folded up in one of the closets was a faded old United States flag made of silk, which Nellie's mother-in-law, Caroline Virginia Osgood, had sewn in 1846 for soldiers from

[92] The 25¢ gold coin, I eventually determined, was not an original from the days of the Gold Rush, but a much later commemorative reissue.

Joliet to carry before them as they fought in the Mexican War. It was pierced with bullet holes and stained with the blood of wounded and dying soldiers. Since there were only twenty-six states in the union in 1846, there were just twenty-six stars on the field of that flag.[93]

In the basement was also a pile of boxes and trunks, which I was told belonged to a friend of Alice's named Margey. I was also told not to mess with them. There they remained all the years we lived in the house. In 1960 my parents sold the house; a few days before they moved out I noticed all those boxes and trunks were gone. When I asked, I was told that Margey finally came and got them. But neither then nor later could I ever get my mother to say who Margey had been and how she had been connected with our family. I still have no idea whether Margey did come and get her things, or whether they were carted off to the dump.

Most mysterious of all, and somewhat frightening to a small boy, was a low mound of earth in the backmost, least accessible part of the basement. It was just the *wrong* size, and to my boyish imagination it looked like a grave; my brother and I called it the grave-mound. Its soil was harder than the earth elsewhere in the floor of the basement, and it seemed to have white powder of some sort mixed in with it. Many, many years later I asked my uncle Richard, Muriel's husband, about that mound. He had been a plasterer, and was well acquainted with every aspect of the builders' trades. He said that the mound was simply the place where the people who made the house's foundation had cleaned out their cement mixing tub. You didn't want to leave the residue in the open yard, so you poured it out of the tub in the least accessible part of the basement.

However, years and years before I asked Richard about it, there was a night when I dreamt that I dug into the mound and found a skull grinning up at me. As I woke up, an old memory came flooding in from the depths of my mind. In that memory I was very young and we were visiting the Monterey Avenue house, but for the first time ever, Earl was not a part of the household there. And ... . I remembered being told, during that visit, not to play in the basement, because "Earl is sleeping there"! I remembered how very perplexed by that I was, since I did not see Earl anywhere in the house.[94]

So I began seriously to wonder whether the mound actually had been a grave ... maybe Earl's grave?

Eventually I went rummaging through all sorts of on-line databases, and I happened on a newspaper article about the return of the Queen Mary to Long Beach Harbor,

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[93] In 1960 my mother donated that flag to the California Historical Society, which keeps it in their collections.

[94] I mentioned that memory to Richard also, and he told me that Earl had taken a year or two to get all of his belongings out of 1912 Monterey Avenue after he left Alice; occasionally he would crash overnight on a daybed that was in the small finished basement with the washtubs.

California, in December, 1967, after a luxury cruise of more than a month's duration. The article specifically mentioned "Chester (Earl) Jones and his wife Helen from Walnut Creek" among the passengers. So the mound was definitely not Earl's grave, nor Helen's either.[95]

In 2019 a new owner had 1912 Monterey Avenue remodeled, and he had the earth-floored basement converted into what his building permit calls an "accessory dwelling unit." The basement floor was dug out, and the mysterious mound is no more. I suppose the workmen who dug the basement out found no old bones there to startle them.

Our neighborhood in Berkeley was called Northbrae, and it was exceptionally well suited for a young boy's urge to roam. There were paths up and down the hills on its east side and strange parks centered on gigantic rocks: Indian Rock Park, Mortar Rock Park, and Cragmont Rock Park. Indian Rock Park was well suited for rock climbing. At Mortar Rock Park you could see the depressions in the rock which had been worn down into cups over the centuries as the Natives had ground their acorns and other hard nuts and grains into flour there, long before any European ever saw California. Cragmont Rock Park offered a towering cliff-face, at the foot of which a small opening went indefinitely far into the rock. One of my fifth-grade classmates, with whom I explored the neighborhood, told me that a long time ago a small boy had crawled into that crack to explore it, and had gotten stuck. He had died in that crack, and his body was still there—no adult had ever been able to get far enough into the crack to recover it. Whether that story was true or not, I cannot tell. I never could find out any more about it. But the crack was clearly both dangerous and tempting. Decades later, when I briefly revisited Berkeley and made the rounds of those parks, I noticed that the crack had finally been closed up with blocks and cement a few feet inside.

As I said at the start of this book, it was my great good fortune that I was neither born nor raised in my hometown. If I had been, the every-day routines of life there would have drowned out the magic and wonder of the city, which I was better able to sense at a distance than close up. By the time we returned there permanently, when I was 10 years old, I had already begun to hunt down and gather up our family stories, and to treasure them. I might not have felt the need to do so had I been born and raised in the place where they happened.

[95] A recent search on the web also turned up a passenger list for a voyage to Honolulu in 1951.

At the End of All Our Stories

Speak to the Past and It Shall Teach Thee.[96]

"MATHIESENS ARE DIFFERENT," my mother would often tell me as I was growing up. Our family is different from all other families, she meant. Within our own family, she also meant, we are all different from one another. This, she also thought, was just how things were meant to be in our family. We were all meant to be different from all other families, and also from all other members of our own family.

I had the impression that this saying had come down to her in her own family. I fancy that her own mother, Zena, as stubborn and independent-minded as anyone, may have told her, "Leathermans are different." Perhaps Zena's mother, Alice, reveling in her family's weirdness, had remarked to her daughter in passing, "Lussiers are different." Perhaps even Alice's mother, Nellie, had said something of that sort, "Osgoods are different," after she had left her conventional life in Joliet, Illinois, and moved West. Whether any of them actually said such words or not, it always seemed to me that each of the generations on my mother's side, from Nellie on down, had lived according to this precept.

Being different from other families, and also from other people in one's own family, is very hard work. It takes considerable effort and thought to pull the trick off. Just going along with one's family and the world into which one had been born is much easier. But few if any of my ancestors have ever taken the easy road through life.

Instead, each of us has needed to be an odd sort of artist, impelled by this ancestral urge of ours to be different. We have had to be the artists and the creators of our own selves, but at the same time we have also been the raw material on which we exercised that odd art of ours. Because of that, each one of us has also been an ongoing work of art, never finished, never perfect, but always under creation.

And so we have spent our lives—each of us differently from all the others—bringing to light our own personal visions of ourselves.

That is why I have put our family's stories down on paper now. They are meant not for entertainment, but for inspiration, as we practice our odd art of self-creation.

These stories of my ancestors have made me who I am. They have always been my most cherished possession. Now I leave them to my children, to my granddaughter, to any further generations that she in turn might chose to raise up after her.

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[96] This is carved on the wall of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University. It echoes the Book of Job (12:8), "Speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee."

At the Sign of the

Dancing Skeletons